THE WAY OF THE WILD

CLARENCE HAWKES

AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

THE WAY OF THE WILD

BOOKS BY

CLARENCE HAWKES

Animal Biographies

BLACK BRUIN. The Biography of a Bear.

KING OF THE FLYING SLEDGE. The Biography of a Reindeer.

KING OF THE THUNDERING HERD. The Biography of an American Bison.

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Nature Stories

TENANTS OF THE TREES.

TRAILS TO WOODS AND WATERS.

THE WAY OF THE WILD.

WANTED A MOTHER. A Story for Children.

Slowly the Flock Circled

Frontispiece see page 170

The Way of the Wild

STORIES OF FIELD AND FOREST

By

CLARENCE HAWKES

Author of "Trails to Woods and Waters," "Shaggycoat," "A Wilderness Dog," "Wanted a Mother," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

CHARLES COPELAND

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Dedicated
to all those who love a winding
woodland path
and the great out of doors

INTRODUCTION

THE animal story of to-day is as much a product of evolution as was the steam engine or the wireless telegraph, and it came in answer to a need.

With music and art made alluring in the public schools and many of the simpler studies taught by means of exciting games, woodcraft had to be put in a form that should appeal to the imagination of children.

Thus it was that Charles G. D. Roberts, Clarence Hawkes, and others came to the front, with their stories of wild life. Stories just as faithful to the facts as the nature essay, and much more interesting to the youthful mind. The result has been of general benefit, for where one person was reading nature books twenty-five years ago, a dozen are reading them now. Not only the animal story, but the nature essay, and even more scientific works are profiting by the increase of interest. So

at the present time, children ten or twelve years of age know very much more about nature, the coming of the seasons, the wild flowers, and the migrations of the birds, than do their parents.

That about twenty volumes of these animal stories recently published should have come from the pen of one without eyesight seems at first thought a contradiction of facts, but with the reading of Clarence Hawkes' autobiography, "Hitting the Dark Trail," which has just found its way into French, this marvel is made plain.

Beethoven produced some of his best symphonies after he lost his sense of hearing. He was able to do this because the laws of music and harmony were firmly established in his soul while he could still hear. So it was with Clarence Hawkes.

For the first fourteen years of his life he not only was possessed of a pair of very keen eyes, that took in everything about him in the field and woods, but he also had the gift of remembering and correlating the things he saw. So

minute and faithful were these boyhood observations that they furnished material for his first eight nature books.

Hunting, fishing, camping, tramping were his chief delight, and these early pictures of the out-of-doors were to stand him in good stead in after years.

I have read many of Clarence Hawkes' books and have always found them true to nature, and of gripping interest. Books that it would be safe and profitable to put in the hands of any young reader whom you wished to introduce to the denizens of field and forest. "Shaggycoat," "Shovelhorns," "A Wilderness Dog," and others are books that will give you the known facts about these animals, in a manner that will both entertain and instruct. While if you wish to know more of this author's life and struggles, read "Hitting the Dark Trail," which has been such an inspiration to the blinded soldiers of the United States, England and France.

ERNEST THOMPSON SETON.

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THE WINDING WAY TO WOODCRAFT

THE WINDING WAY TO WOODCRAFT

THE winding way is a pleasant way and this is partly because it is winding. The straight way on the other hand has no surprises because one can see so far ahead. But with the winding way it is different.

It is like Life full of surprises. One cannot tell what new thing he will stumble upon at the very next turn only a few yards ahead.

There are many kinds of winding ways, but all are interesting. The first winding way that the good people of Boston knew was a cow path, upon which they finally builded their main street. It is rather amusing to think that perhaps a frisky calf may have struck out the first thoroughfare of the great city.

The winding way may be also an old wood road running far back into the timber land. I know many such and they are all interesting. This is because they go twisting and winding

in and out to accommodate themselves to the timber and the unevenness of the ground. Then in the early days there were Indian trails and deer paths in our northern country. The Indian trails were finally used by the settlers for bridle paths and the cows often followed old deer paths to the best water-holes. Many of the great streets of the world's greatest cities were formerly but stage-coach approaches to a small trading post. Such was one of the great avenues of New York in the days when the first John Jacob Astor brought down beaver pelts from Albany on his back and traded with the Indians for the first few dollars of the Astor fortune.

Almost no railroad has ever climbed a high mountain chain but what the adventuresome traveler was there before the railroad riding a faithful pony up a steep bridle path. The prairie schooners of the early days marked the way for the mighty transcontinental railroads which to-day connect the Atlantic and the Pacific seaboards. But when the railroad and the smooth straight macadam road take the

place of the winding way, they spoil it for the nature lover. This is because they straighten all its crooks, go round its steepest climbs, and despoil much of the adjacent landscape in so doing. There is no great gain in this old world that is wholly without loss. So all the improvements which man seeks to perpetrate on nature take away something from her primitive beauty. Of course we all appreciate the telephone and the telegraph, but a telephone pole always looks out of place along a country road.

So to-day for your winding way, you will have to go back away from the beaten tracks to the less cultivated or civilized country, country that is too poor or too out of the way for the invasions of civilization. There you will still find many a cow path and old wood road, twisting and winding on its devious way. It will not matter much what season of the year you go, there will always be something interesting.

If it is springtime the arbutus will arrest you with its fragrance even before you find its vine deep hidden in the grass and dead leaves.

If you are not so fortunate as to discover this rare wild flower, then the hepatica, the anemone, the bloodroot, or perhaps a shadbush will make the pathway glad. The first birds will be singing and nesting. The squirrels scolding and frisking and all the woods glad and glorious in the scant illusive dress of springtime.

If it is summer the path will riot with beauty and glory. Flowers and fruit will be ready for the picking, berries that the birds planted and flowers that were sown by the winds of heaven.

If it is autumn you will have to vie with the squirrels in a mad scramble for nuts. On every hand you will see the promises of summer fully redeemed, for nature pays all her notes. A carpet of brown, russet and gold will rustle beneath your feet, while the campfires of autumn will burn brightly along the watercourses, on soft maple, and stag-horn sumac.

Even in winter this winding way will be beautiful. The new snow will gem all its trees and weeds with ridges of pearl. The plumes

of the evergreens will look like white caps and flowing gowns. Blue shadows will steal from behind the trees, perhaps to accent a very red sunset.

So the winding way is beautiful and wonderful in all seasons. I advise each of my readers to seek it as often as possible. It will rest your tired nerves more than sleep and its bracing air is the very best tonic.

Breathe deep breaths of pine and balsam, or the fragrance of new-mown hay. These are primitive scents full of healing and comfort.

Lay your own tired heart close to the great beating heart of Mother Nature and rest. Rest and be glad. Forget time and the city life and its hustle and bustle. Just let the wonder and the peace of the winding way steal into your soul and make you a child again. The simplest and the best of all children, a child of nature.

CHAPTER I

THE STORY OF BLUIE

The Way of the Wild

CHAPTER I

THE STORY OF BLUIE

THE story of Bluie is one of the strangest of all the bird chronicles that has ever come under my observation, during thirty years of study of the ways of our little furred and feathered friends. I will tell it to you just as it happened, without any embellishments, so that you may be absolutely sure that you are reading a real story about a real bird.

To my mind it is just another one of those strange happenings in nature which shows that the wild creatures, especially the birds and squirrels, often long for human companionship and friendship.

This is why the song-birds flock into our country villages and even frequent great cities. Thus they may be on the outskirts of civiliza-

tion, and watch men and women come and go. There is a wonderful companionship for us with the song-birds. It is a great compliment to man to have the swallows build in the eaves of his buildings and the robins and orioles plan their nests in his very dooryard. They teach us many valuable lessons. Their friendship should be cultivated as a priceless thing, and children should be taught at every opportunity to befriend them.

Bluie, as you may have guessed, was a bluebird. He came to us as the result of a tragedy in birdland—just one more of those tragedies which are always occurring. If it is not the cat, or some larger bird that preys upon the weaker, then it is the elements.

For several years a pair of bluebirds had made their home in a deserted woodpecker's nest in an old sweet-apple tree in the back yard. We were sure that this was the same pair of bluebirds that came to us year after year, because they did the same things each year. They were just as familiar with the place the day that they returned in the spring as they

were the day that they flew away to the South. As soon as they arrived they would always look for food in the places where we had left it the year before, and also for material with which to patch up last year's nest. So they were our old friends without a doubt.

The year in question they had come as usual and repaired the nest. There had seemed to be some doubt in their minds as to whether to use the old home again. They had prospected about for a while house-hunting, but had finally come back to the old home.

The nest had been rebuilt as usual, the eggs laid and the fledglings hatched, when the tragedy occurred. It happened when the fledglings were two or three weeks old. They were fully feathered out and would have been able to fly in another week. As some of my readers doubtless know a small bluebird is not blue at all, but black as a young crow. It is not until some months later that the young birds put on the markings of their elders.

One afternoon late in May a violent thunder and wind storm came up. The rains fell in

torrents and the wind blew a hurricane. When it finally cleared up and we looked outside, we found that the old sweet-apple tree had been laid low. Our first thought was not of the loss of the tree, but of the bluebirds' nest.

We found that the tree had split open in its fall and the nest lay upon the ground. The two young bluebirds were still in it, but they had received a bad shaking up. The old birds had evidently thought that the end of the world had come, for we never saw them again. If they did come back to look for their nest, we did not know it.

We set the nest with the fledglings in it upon the piazza, in a conspicuous place, in hopes that if the old birds returned they would see it. By nightfall, as they had not discovered the nest, we brought it into the house. One of the small birds died the first night, but Bluie survived and thrived from the very first.

We were full of misgivings as to our ability to raise him, but he surprised us at every turn. In fact he fitted into our life so well that one

might have thought that we too had sometime been bluebirds.

At first we fed him on crackers and milk, but I finally concluded that he ought to have a worm diet as well, so I spent half an hour each day looking up small worms for him. These he ate out of my hands with great relish and much greed.

A bird will eat several times as much food, for its size, as any other creature. It is said on good authority that a young robin in the nest will eat fourteen feet of angleworms per day. I presume this is true, as I have seen the old birds carry worms to their nest nearly all day long. At night the young mouths would be stretched up as eagerly as in the morning.

In two weeks after we adopted him, Bluie was flying about the kitchen. He accomplished this by degrees. One day the mistress started to go into the living-room and just for a joke as she passed through the door, she turned and said, "Want to come in here, Bluie?" To her great astonishment the little

fellow flew down on her shoulder from the top of a door and rode into the living-room. Here he flew about for half an hour having a fine time investigating.

When the cuckoo clock struck, it gave him quite a fright as he happened to be sitting on it at the time. But he soon got used to it; in fact this became his favorite perch in the living-room.

The following day as the mistress started to go up-stairs to do the chamber work, Bluie fluttered down to her shoulder and rode up-stairs.

After that he had the entire range of the house. Whenever he saw the mistress open a door, he knew that it meant an excursion to unknown parts, so he would fly upon her shoulder and ride away with great delight. In this manner he even made trips to the neighboring houses. But we were rather careful where we took him, fearing that he might be frightened.

At first we did not dare let him go outside, for fear that we would lose him, but he seemed

to be bound to us by a golden cord, the golden cord of love. We were his father and mother and the big house was his nest, and he loved us accordingly.

We could call him from the trees or even from a distant lot simply by whistling to him. Each night when I came home from work I would whistle as soon as I came into the yard. If the little fellow was anywhere in hearing, he would fly and light upon my finger and ride into the house in state.

Bluie was a marvel to all our friends. Each week we thought he would grow tired of his half civilized life and fly away with his free fellows, but he stuck by us until autumn.

By that time he had put on the full livery of a male bluebird, with the pretty red ruffs. Then a call came to him, which his kind had obeyed from time immemorial, a call that was stronger than his love for his foster parents. It was not without a struggle, though, that we lost him.

One bright day about the last of October we saw him in a distant lot with several other blue-

birds. I went into the house and reported to the mistress. "The bluebirds are flocking," I said, "and Bluie is with them. It is the call of nature. I am very much afraid we will lose him."

Together we went out into the field and I whistled for him. He answered with his shrill sweet little Cheerily, Cheerily, but would not come to me. Again and again I whistled. Each time he would answer, but would not come. Several times that evening I went out and tried to coax him into the house. He was still good friends with me, but mightily interested in his own kin. Perhaps a lady bluebird had already begun to flirt with him, although he was not of the courting age.

For two or three days the flock of bluebirds lingered in the field. Each day I went out and whistled for Bluie. Each time he answered me, but he would not light on my shoulder or even come near me.

"I see you, master," he seemed to be saying. "We are still good friends. You are all right. The house is a fine place, but the fields and the

blue sky are better. I have found my own. It is great to be a real bluebird."

One bright morning, just as I came out to take the car for work, the flock of bluebirds whirred up out of the field and skimmed away southward. I watched them until they were mere specks in the distance, then sorrowfully said, " Good-bye, Bluie. You were a wonderful little fellow. We loved you strangely, but we gladly give you back to nature where you belong. Good luck, little chap, but we will miss you."

CHAPTER II

BLUE FOX GOES HUNTING

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BLUE FOX GOES HUNTING

THE blue fox is first cousin to the red fox, which is so well known in the United States. He is also cousin to all the foxes, for the fox family is very closely interwoven, as far as breeding is concerned. The blue fox, the white Alaskan fox, the red fox, the silver gray, or black fox are all members of the same family, and no one can tell when one or the other of the rare specimens will appear in even a vulgar fox family. That is what makes fox breeding so difficult. The black and the blue foxes will not stay blue or black.

Old fox hunters say that they have rarely seen two foxes identically alike in color and markings, so every fox is a sort of species unto himself.

One thing is certain, all the members of the numerous fox family have definite character-

istics, which always appear, no matter what the color.

They always have the sharp muzzle and that shape of the head which is called foxy, although the blue fox is not so snipey as some of the others.

The general public have some very erroneous ideas as to the size and weight of a fox, once he is stripped of his beautiful coat. The fact is, the slimmest grayhound looks fat and stocky beside a fox when he is minus his coat. His fleet legs, which will carry him all day before the fastest hounds, are as slight as a lead pencil, while his girth is no larger than a man's wrist.

I have known many fox hunters and the largest dog fox they ever saw weighed fourteen pounds, while the female fox often does not weigh more than seven or eight.

Having considered the fox family as a whole, I will tell you of Blue Fox's hunting trip which I started out to describe.

Blue Fox was stockier and had a squarer head than most of the fox family, but his skull

contained the same fox wits, notwithstanding its shape.

He was making his way across the barrens which stretched from a mountain peak, down to the sheer cliffs which skirted the desolate Behring Sea. This barren land was covered with wild wheat and creeping willow, and was gay with wild poppies which everywhere abound in Alaska.

Midway in the barrens, a foaming stream ran cold from the glacier which crept down the distant peak. Its snow water was white as milk. Although this was Alaska, yet there was such a wealth of gay flora along the banks of this stream as would have astonished the stranger in this strange land. We think of Alaska as the land of ice and snow, yet her summers are a marvel and a delight.

Along the stream which Blue Fox was skirting, grew great masses of larkspur of every rose tint known to fashion. Gentians bluer than the blue heavens were there in wild profusion. Forget-me-nots that would have gladdened the heart of a hothouse keeper bloomed

by the millions to be had merely for the picking. Wild phlox lifted its gay head everywhere, while the wild poppies splashed the scene with gay patches of splendid color. This magic of the arctic sun is the wonder of the floral world. So it was a gay and beautiful country that Blue Fox traveled as he went hunting on this summer morning.

When Blue Fox had crossed the barrens (which are called tundra in the old world), he came to the top of a series of precipitate cliffs leading down to the sandpits which fringed the waters of the Behring Sea.

Down these cliffs by devious paths he picked his way, often climbing down sheer cliffs where the footing would have troubled a Rocky Mountain goat. Yet he went with ease and balanced himself where there was no apparent footing.

Arrived at the water's edge, he was rewarded for his pains, for he found the clams plenty where the receding tide had left them high and dry. He selected several and with infinite pains broke their hinges with his

crunching jaws and deliberately ate out the inside.

But this was only the beginning of his breakfast, for he was an epicurean.

He skirted the shore for half a mile until he came to a favorite rookery for the sea birds, then he began a slow and arduous ascent of the cliffs. Half-way up, there were hundreds of the nests of sea-gulls, or shags, as the sailors call them. Although the angry birds swooped and screamed at the robber, yet he kept doggedly on his way. Finally he discovered a nest within his reach which the frightened mother shag had left. He lifted the egg gently in his mouth and continued his desperate climb to the top of the cliff. When he had scaled the last breathless twenty feet, he lay down upon a rock and, breaking a small hole in the large end of the egg, deliberately sucked it to the last drop.

He paid no more attention to the screaming gulls, auks and kittywinks, than he would have to flies.

But when he had finished his egg, he had to

think of Mrs. Blue Fox and the four kit foxes in the burrow half a mile away. The kit foxes were pulling on the dam and he had to keep her nourished. She must have something besides egg, so he set his wits to work for his family.

Very leisurely, Mr. Blue Fox proceeded along the cliff. Occasionally he stopped to sniff at a rock, or to stretch himself, or to yawn. He was a very innocent looking chap, intent merely on a morning walk along the cliff. Presently he came to a rock which suited his purpose.

It was large and flat, just the sort of a rock to take a sun bath on. So he climbed upon it and lay down, stretching and yawning. He really looked tired to death, just ready for a long morning nap. He curled himself up into a round ball, his tail streaming out on the rock behind him.

The gulls, kittywinks, and auks circled nearer. They had really never had a good look at a sleeping fox. Mr. Blue Fox was usually so wide awake and energetic that his sleepiness interested them. Nearer and nearer

they circled. Finally the crafty hunter lifted his fine brush slowly and then let it fall. The excitement among the circling birds increased. Again he tried the experiment.

Curiosity is the most dangerous quality that the wild creatures possess; for instance wigwagging deer is a favorite method of shooting them. Mr. Fox was wigwagging gulls.

Again he repeated the interesting experiment. In an unguarded moment, a curious shag circled not four feet above him. Then something happened that was not on the gull's program. With a motion as sudden as though propelled by gunpowder, Mr. Fox shot into the air and his powerful jaws closed upon the unfortunate gull's neck. He brought the shag flapping to the rock and with one turn of his head broke his neck. Thus Mrs. Fox and the kit foxes had their breakfast.

Then he deliberately threw the dead bird over his shoulder and trotted away, a very successful hunter.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST BALLOONIST

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THE FIRST BALLOONIST

MAN is very apt to get puffed up and full of vanity when he considers his discoveries and his achievements in many ways. But there is very little that he knows or has discovered but what was used by either animals, birds or insects, even before man appeared in the world. All of the secrets of nature are as old as the world itself, and the wonder is that man has not discovered more of them sooner.

Man considers himself a great builder. He is proud of his houses, his dams, his bridges and tunnels. Yet the animals, birds, insects and some fishes have in a degree known the art of house-building. The beaver is a better dam builder than man when we consider his size. The spider is a better bridge builder, and the mole can make a more scientific tunnel. So why should man be puffed up?

Did you ever go out on a summer morning, when there had been a heavy dew the night before and see an entire field literally covered with a wonderful fine mesh, that sparkled and glistened in the sunlight until it looked like fairy-land? Many of the tops of the taller grasses were bound together, ever so delicately, by a wonderful shimmering something, which you children called cobwebs. In the summer-time you will see these delicate shimmering garments on the tall weeds, and on the walls along the roadside.

Did you ever stop to think that this is all the work of the spiders and the fields are beautiful this morning because a million spiders wanted to travel, catch flies, or amuse themselves?

Yet this is the case. The spider is the original balloonist. He also knows the use of the parachute and he can disport himself in the air more gracefully than any bird, and as airily as thistle-down. In fact his ballooning is a sort of thistle-down performance. For he has discovered the secret of all the lighter than air flying machines.

Place a spider on a block of wood in the middle of a dish of water and see what will happen. He will first run about the wood till he sees that in every direction is water. Then he will rear upon his hind legs and begin spinning a thread. This is made by his spitting out a liquid which is contained in his long bottle-shaped abdomen. As soon as this liquid reaches the air, it becomes the very delicate solid which we know as web, or gossamer. Perhaps he made the gossamer too heavy the first time, so it sinks in the water. If so he will try again. Presently you will see the tiny thread float across to the side of the dish. When it has become strong enough to hold him, Mr. Spider will walk across on his suspension bridge and climb up the side of the dish, laughing at you all the time.

One of the favorite pastimes of the spider is ballooning or parachuting, whichever suits him at the time.

He will climb upon a wall or fence where there is a current of air and free space for his flying performance. He will stand upon his

hind legs and spin out a long glistening thread. If he has made the thread right and there is enough air to carry it you will see it floating away in the air, and balancing. When Mr. Spider thinks it is long enough to hold his weight, he will slide on to the end coming from his mouth and float away as gracefully as a parachute man.

But this parachute act is not so interesting as his ballooning which calls for more spinning. This time he will climb up as before for the flight. He will weave much more gossamer than he did for the parachute. This he will weave into a cradle or basket, shaping it with his hind feet. When the basket is ready he will spin more long threads to act as stays for his basket, and to buoy it up. When all is ready and there comes a strong gust of air he launches his tiny cradle in air and goes sailing away just as skillfully as any other balloonist. But like man he has no power to control the direction which he will travel, and has to go where the air takes him.

The cunning old spider who weaves a skill-

ful web and hides in one corner and watches for flies is also a very wise fellow if he is something of a cannibal. But so long as he hunts mere flies we do not care.

So the reason why the fields and fences are so beautiful on summer mornings when they sparkle and glisten is because the spiders wanted to go somewhere and so built bridges, or launched parachutes and sailed balloons. Then the dewdrop people came and gemmed these shimmering gossamers with diamonds, making a fairy-land of beauty and wonder.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT PUZZLED THE ROBINS

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WHAT PUZZLED THE ROBINS

One spring when Cock Robin and My Lady came north they decided that they would seek an entirely new nesting place. They had been having rather poor luck with their babies for several years so they thought they would find a new place for the house.

For the past three years they had built in an apple tree in a farmer's dooryard. This had been a fine place for the nest and they had enjoyed the farmer and his wife. The children were also very friendly, but there were other drawbacks. The farmer kept a lot of cats. So each time they knocked the new brood out of the nest they were sure to lose some of the fledglings.

The starlings also troubled them. The grackles were likewise not on good terms with the robin family. But worst of all a villainous black crow had found the nest one morning

very early, before the farmer was up, and had robbed it of every small bird. If the farmer had been up he would have spoken to Mr. Crow with his bangstick, but the crow was too early for the farmer and the murder had gone unpunished.

So for all these reasons the robins decided to seek a new home. They prospected about for a long time. Finding a really fine place for a nest is a task that takes patience. So many things have to be considered. They investigated orchards and barns and many other outbuildings before they finally made a decision. The place that they finally decided upon pleased them both exceedingly, but what it was or what it was used for they did not know.

It was not far from a railroad depot, the terminal of a small country line. There was only one train a day and that went to the city in the morning and returned at night.

There were a lot of iron beams and cross-beams and the place was rather dark and secluded. Cock Robin felt sure that cats never

came there. They discovered this spot about nine o'clock in the morning; the train had gone to the city two hours before and the yard was quiet. In fact it was nearly always quiet, except at morning and evening. They had wasted so much time searching that they went to work diligently and by night they had the nest partly built. Mud and straw had been plenty and they had never before made such progress. They roosted in a tree near by that night feeling very happy over the day's work.

You can well imagine their astonishment and disgust on the following morning to find the nest gone. They did not go to see it until after the train had gone and the yard was quiet. The beam where they had placed it was there but no nest. Neither were there any signs of their labors. When a nest is blown down there is usually some mud left clinging to the place, but this beam was quite clean. They were much puzzled, but set to work again with a will. The birds and the wild creatures have a patience that puts to shame the best efforts of man. If they do not succeed at first they try

again. So they worked very hard all day and by night had the nest half done again.

Cock Robin was the first to investigate the nest on the following morning and he hastened to report to My Lady. The new nest that they had worked on the day before was gone, but the old one was back. He could tell it because it was shaped slightly differently. They had also used more straw in it. My Lady laughed at him, but he stuck to it that it was the nest they had worked on two days before.

"Well," said My Lady, "I am just as well suited with this one. Let's finish it." So they went to work, and by night it was nearly completed. It only needed a few finishing touches and some shaping which My Lady always did herself. The robins went to roost that night feeling very jubilant. Cock Robin prolonged his evening song on account of the nearly finished nest.

When he flew to the nest in the morning with his beak full of straw, he dropped the straw at the first sight of the nest and flew away to tell his wife.

The nest which had been so nearly completed was gone, and the half built nest was back in its place. They were much troubled and flew back and forth "quitting" and "quitting." Some one was playing them a mean trick. But Mrs. Robin finally persuaded her husband that this nest was almost as good as the other and if they hurried they might even finish it that day. So they worked with a will and by night it was done.

It was a very happy pair of robins that went to roost that night. On the morrow there would be a blue robin's egg in the nest.

Mrs. Robin was the first to inspect the nest in the morning. In fact she went to lay the first egg of the set. But she soon came flying to Cock Robin with strange news. The completed nest was gone and in its place was the nearly completed one.

But Cock Robin could not explain it. He could only "quit" and fly about.

But finally he and Mrs. Robin together finished the nest in the forenoon and in the afternoon Mrs. Robin laid the first egg. This

egg was very large for a robin's egg, and of a heavenly blue, and she was quite proud of it.

As soon as the train had gone on the following morning she flew to the nest. She would lay another egg that day. She was very happy.

You can perhaps imagine her astonishment to find that the nest with the egg in it was not there, but the other nest that they had finished two days before was back and there was of course no egg in it.

Although Mrs. Robin was astonished beyond bird expression, yet she set to work to repair the damage by laying a second egg. But this egg was not so large, and not quite so deep a blue as the other.

Cock Robin himself went to inspect the nest on the following morning. To tell the truth this sudden disappearance of the nests was getting on his nerves. He came back with a strange report. The nest containing the large blue egg was back, but the other nest was gone.

"Well," said My Lady, "I don't like it,

but as long as we have a nest with one egg in it, let's be satisfied."

"But," said Cock Robin, "we have got two nests and each one has an egg in it."

But Mrs. Robin was so interested laying her eggs that she did not trouble her head about it, but laid a second egg in the nest with the small egg.

But wonder of wonders, on the morrow, the nest with two eggs in it was gone and the nest with the large egg in it was back. This really alarmed Cock Robin. But Mrs. Robin laid another egg beside the large egg and they had two nests with two eggs in each.

That night after Mrs. Robin was asleep on the roost, for she had been so disturbed that she had not dared to stay on the nest, brave Cock Robin decided he would guard the nest and find out what it was that stole the home away each day, so he sat upon the eggs all night.

In the morning the train came in, made up as usual, and went away to the city. But it had barely left the station when a very excited

Cock Robin flew away to find Mrs. Robin and tell her the wonderful story. It had been a terrible ordeal for the brave little bird, but he had solved the mystery. He knew where their extra nest went each day.

Cock Robin had been very comfortable on the nest all night and he had begun to think that it was not going to leave them that day when they started to make up the train in the yard. But presently the Great Thunderer, as the robins called the locomotive, was detached from the train and came roaring and hissing along the shiny rails toward the place where poor little Cock Robin was sitting on his nest. He was terribly frightened and was about to fly away when it passed above him, and he could not fly out, or he was too scared to.

Then there was the talk of the men above and the beams, the cross-beams, and Cock Robin and his nest began slowly moving. They swung around further and further and then finally stood still. Then the Great Thunderer rolled away snorting and thundering.

Cock Robin, frightened nearly to death, flew

out from under the turntable and went to tell his wife.

The trainmen saw him go and soon discovered the nest. They also found the second nest at the other end of the turntable.

"Plucky little fellows, aren't they?" said one man. "Let's watch them and see how they make it go. It must seem strange to them to have their two houses shifted about each day."

In a very few seconds both robins came back and Cock Robin proudly showed his wife the second nest only twenty feet away and quite as secure as its fellow.

But My Lady was very much disturbed, and not much elated over her mate's discovery.

"I can't sit on the eggs in both nests at once. What can I do? Half of the eggs will spoil."

"Well, we will see," said her mate, who was so tickled with himself for being so clever that he did not worry about the second nest. But he did get excited when his mate announced her plan. In fact, he was very angry at the suggestion.

"You have got to sit on the eggs in the second nest. That is the only way," announced Mrs. Robin. "I am not going to lay eggs for nothing."

Cock Robin protested that he would spoil his plumage and also made many other excuses, but his wife had her own way (just as the ladies usually do). So poor Cock Robin sat on the extra eggs and they hatched two broods of young robins.

The trainmen watched them all through the process. They were so impressed with their pluck that they helped feed the young birds and that gave their parents a great help.

Finally when it was time for the two broods to be shoved out of the nest, the trainmen picked them up under the turntable and placed them in trees near by, so that all survived.

But when Cock Robin proposed that they raise another brood on one nest this time, My Lady struck. She said that two broods were enough for that year and that she wasn't going to live under the Great Thunderer any longer. So they took their double family to a near-

by orchard and spent a very pleasant summer.

This is a strange romance in birdland, but the trainmen who gave me the main incident say that " it is true," and I give it to you just as I received it.

CHAPTER V

A RING-TAILED ROGUE

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A RING-TAILED ROGUE

Of all the wild pets that I have ever had any experience with, the raccoon is the most satisfactory. The raccoon is sometimes called the Little Brother to the Bear, and really belongs to the bear, or plantigrade family. Like the bear, he is very good natured and he also has some of the bear's drollery and his mischievousness as well. Many of the wild creatures such as the fox are so wild by nature that they really never become wholly tame. You may take a kit fox from the den when he is a month old and rear him by hand, but he will always have his fox suspicion of you. No matter how much you may pet him, his jaws will always come up to meet your hand. Although he may not bite you, he is always on the watch and always suspicious.

The raccoon, on the other hand, is a very

lovable fellow and soon learns to like his boy master after a fashion.

When I was a small boy, we captured a couple of coon cubs and kept them as long as possible. Their pranks and the mischief that they got into made our place very lively most of the time. We caught them in May while mending fences. A small fox hound that always followed wherever I went on the farm treed something in an old birch stub and the hired man and I went to investigate. As the stub seemed rather rotten, we both put our shoulders against it and to our great surprise it went over. This surprised a family of raccoons as well. The two old raccoons fled with a great snarling as did the cubs. The hound caught one of the cubs and killed it, while the hired man and myself each caught a cub alive. The rest of the family escaped, but where they went I never knew, for they disappeared as though the earth had opened and swallowed them, but I presume they were just hiding near by in a tree.

The two cubs that we captured were very

lively. At first they tried to bite and scratch, but seeing we did not intend to hurt them, they became quite docile. I took them home in a grain sack in which we had brought the horses' noon feed and later on made a cage for them with a small wire netting yard. Here they lived for a month, but they grew so rapidly and seemed so active that I finally decided that these quarters were too confining for them. In the front yard there was a small ash tree, tall and slender, so I built a chicken wire fence ten feet from its base which entirely encircled the tree. In this yard I put the raccoons' house and left them free to climb the tree at their own sweet will. This pleased them greatly and they chased each other up and down the tree with great glee. They often slept in the tree and really lived in it far more than they did on the ground.

I finally named the raccoons Tobius and Cochunko and we called them Toby and Chunk for short. All the boys and girls in the neighborhood came to see them, and they were often let out of their tree pen so that they might get

a better acquaintance with them. Sometimes after they had been out of the pen for several hours at a time, it was hard to catch them. I always went to see that they were safe in the pen for the night.

They were as much alike as two peas, although Tobius was always a little larger, but each had the ringed tail, the black spectacles about the eyes and the ring about the nose. Their coats were thick and soft and they were always fat as butter.

They were not particular about their diet, but they were very careful to wash everything they ate, so we kept a wooden trough in their pen for that purpose. I suppose this is because of the raccoon's habit of washing fish as soon as he catches them.

Whenever I went fishing, I always saved the dace and suckers for the raccoons. Also when I dressed the fish, the heads were likewise saved.

In fact, the two usually stood by me while I dressed my catch and took the heads as fast as they came off.

One day when they were left outside, the pair visited a fish-pond kept by a neighbor a score of rods away and each caught a large trout. I suppose they had become tired of fish heads and suckers and wanted a taste of trout.

The last of July my grandfather, who kept the garden, complained that the woodchucks were eating the summer squashes. Some of them they ate, while they merely scooped out the seeds and left the shell of others.

A week or two later, grandfather said that something was bending down the sweet corn and then stripping off the ears. In fact, most of our first planting of sweet corn disappeared before we discovered the thieves. One day I caught them in the act. The thieves were Tobius and Cochunko. They would bend a stalk of corn down under the fore leg and then strip off the ear and eat it at their leisure.

They also visited the sweet-apple trees and ate many apples, but spoiled more than they ate. They finally became so destructive that we were obliged to place them again in the tree

pen and only let them out for short plays when we could watch them.

After the fruit was picked and the vegetables gathered in the autumn we again let them loose. In fact they roamed about the place much as they liked. I merely saw that they were safe in the pen for the night.

About this time one of our chicken coops was raided and two pullets killed. One was partly eaten, but the other was left.

We at once decided that it was the work of a fox, but wondered why he did not carry off the dead pullet. So I set a trap that night and awaited developments.

To my great surprise, in the morning I found a rather small raccoon in my trap. The culprit looked like Cochunko, but it could not be he, for both of my pets were safe in the tree pen. I went to investigate and saw that Tobius was the only occupant of the pen, so it was really Cochunko.

He was merely caught by the toes and was not much injured, but his feelings were evidently badly hurt, for when I pressed down the

I Always Went to See That They Were Safe for the Night

trap and released him he made for the woods at his best pace. I followed after him calling and trying to regain his confidence, but he would have none of me. So I was obliged to let him go back to the wild.

So far as I know, Tobius never took any of our chickens although we lost others that fall. In the late autumn, we let him come and go just as he pleased. Finally about the first of December he also disappeared and I thought we had lost him for good, but I finally discovered him one day up in the sugar-house where he had taken refuge in a sap hogshead.

The hogshead was partly filled with leaves and he had a fine warm nest where he was sleeping away the winter. As I hated to lose him, I brought him to the house and chained him in a warm place under the shed. I put an old dog collar on him so that I was sure that he could not get away.

He did not eat as much as he had in the autumn and was rather sleepy, but occasionally aroused and came out to see us. In the early spring, one day when I went to see him, I

pulled out the chain as usual but found no raccoon at the end of it. The chain had been broken close to the collar and Tobius had gone after his brother back to the wild.

I did not see him again until the middle of the summer. Then one day while I was hoeing corn, I discovered my pet coming slowly toward me. He was evidently half afraid, yet he wanted to see me for some reason. He would advance and then retreat and was quite uncertain what to do. So I sat down and waited, keeping very still. When he got close to me, I began talking to him just as I had been in the habit of doing.

I called him old Toby and said that he was a good chap, if he had run away. Finally he came up close enough for me to put my hand on him, but he soon retreated. Then he sat down and looked at me, I thought reproachfully. Finally he came up close and stood looking at me with a grieved, injured air. I wondered what was the matter with him.

I had often seen a dog act like that when he wanted something, but never a raccoon.

Finally I remembered his collar and stooped down to see if he still had it on. I found it deeply imbedded in his fur and very tight. Here was the secret of his friendliness. The collar was choking him. I had put it on, and he thought I could fix it. So I carefully unbuckled it, and put it in my pocket. As he felt the collar slip from his neck, the ring-tailed culprit turned and scuttled for the woods without even stopping to say thank you. Once a dozen rods away he turned and looked back at me. I thought he was trying to make up his mind whether to return or to go back to the woods, but the call of his kind and the forest was too much for him, so he finally turned and disappeared in the woods.

This was the last that I ever saw of Tobius or Cochunko. They had gone the way of most of my wild pets, so I was not surprised. We had enjoyed them while they were with us and now missed them, but it was the way of nature.

CHAPTER VI

BIRD SONGS AND CALL NOTES AND WHAT THEY MEAN

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Did you ever stop to think what a cheerless old world this would be if there were no bird songs, and how much these simple songs do to cheer us and make us glad? Especially is this true of the country. I do not think the country would really be country at all without them.

How could Mother Nature ever call up the wild flowers, had not Bluebird announced springtime from the top of the elm tree several weeks before spring showed the faintest signs of coming? How could the first touch of green appear upon the lawn, and the first dandelion lift its golden head, had not the robin announced such events, and the meadow-lark been singing, "Spring o' the year, Spring o' the year" for days down in the meadow? How could the cowslips lift their bright yellow

blossoms along the brookside had not the red winged blackbird made the meadow glad with his cheerful call, so full of the very ecstasy of spring?

I am sure that the buds could not unfold, or the blossoms appear in the fruit trees, did they not know that the birds were building in their branches, and that they needed the leafy fastnesses to hide their nests.

I lie awake several mornings in late March in order that I may not miss the robin's first morning song. He is the chorister for the birds' matin song. No one dares to sing until he gives the cry.

His call to awake, arise and sing always comes suddenly, or it sounds sudden. "Quit, quit, quit, wake up and be glad," he cries. From a distant tree, another robin responds with the morning matin song and the chorister himself joins in the glad refrain. "Cheery cheerup, cheery cheerup." It is certainly a good way to begin the day, with cheery cheerup. If you keep this song in your heart all day long, things will not go badly with you,

or if they do for a while, you will cheer up and overcome them.

To my mind, the bird songs are the most true and tender expressions of gratitude to God that this old earth ever hears. They make man's petitions seem stale and incomplete. To hear the robins singing in the rain, their coats drabbled with wet and their toes perhaps numb with cold, is both an inspiration and a rebuke. If the robins sing when it rains, why not we?

There are many birds that are so glad that they sing on the wing.

To them winging is singing, and singing means winging. Conspicuous in this last are: The bobolink, the meadow-lark, the oriole, the wild canary, the vesper sparrow, the oven bird, and several others whose songs are not so beautiful. To me, the wild canary when he flies always seems to be saying, " O see us go; O see us go; O see us go," over and over.

The song of the woodcock on the wing is wonderful and many naturalists have never heard it. Even Mr. Burroughs was nearly

sixty when he first heard the woodcock sing on the wing.

The woodcock is one of the first arrivals in the springtime. You will hear his hoarse glad cry along the brookside, a note which is identical with the hoarse cry made by the nighthawk as he sails through the summer skies a few weeks later. If you have good eyes and you know what this cry prefaces, presently you will see Mr. Woodcock go sailing up into the spring sky. He zigzags up, as he is not a strong flyer.

When he is well up, he will fly about for a while, in perfect silence, then he will come zigzagging down, pivoting and wheeling, and pouring out his liquid song, which sounds like about a dozen canaries all singing at once.

There are many songs so simple and so characteristic that any one can tell them. Such songs as that of the cuckoo, which, when he is very busy eating tent-caterpillars, is shortened to simply the second syllable coo. The wild weird cry of the whippoorwill cannot be mistaken.

Nor can the song of the ring-dove, or that of the mourning dove; the latter is so slight in sound that it would not be heard at all were it not so perfectly given. This song is often heard before a storm. There are other good weather prophets who warn us of coming storms. The robin sings a sad, sweet song before the rain. The cuckoo, the bob-white and others give us warning of approaching storms, as do certain owls.

The notes of alarm which the birds use are quite different from their songs. They are always given with a rising inflection and there is a harassed, pathetic quality to those notes. One day I stepped to my front door with a couple of small sparrow-hawks balanced on my finger. They were too small to fly and perfectly harmless, but what happened?

In less than a minute's time, there were at least fifty birds of probably a dozen different species, crying and quitting at the top of their voices, protesting in no uncertain language that I, the friend of birds, had dared bring these robbers and murderers to my front door.

The birds made such a fuss that I was obliged to carry the young hawks into the house.

It is very pleasant on an autumn night when hundreds of sparrows and other birds have gone to roost in the vines that run the entire length of my house, to hear the birds cheeping and twittering to one another softly before they tuck their heads under their wings and go to sleep. Perhaps they are saying good-night, and wishing each other pleasant dreams.

The same soft notes come from the fledglings each night as the twilight settles and they prepare to sleep.

When I am not too busy, I always go to the piazza to hear the vesper song of the birds. It is a most tender and beautiful way in which to close the day, a sort of benediction that lingers long in my heart.

First the robin will begin his evening song. Another will answer from a distant tree-top, for all the world like an echo. If I happen to be at the little cottage where I sometimes go in the springtime, then the veery will trill from a near-by thicket his remarkable de-

scending spiral song, wild and weird, like the very spirit of the woods, yet wonderfully tender. Then the wood-thrush, which Mr. Burroughs considers the finest of all our song-birds, will fill in the silence with his flute-like song, liquid as molten silver falling into a crucible of gold. Soon the whippoorwills will call from a distance, the minor note of the woods. Perhaps the hermit thrush will close the concert with a song so tender and beautiful that I am left breathless and entranced.

As the vesper songs of the birds grow fainter and fainter, the cricket takes up the refrain from the grass near by. "Cheep cheep cheep. I am glad too. I am not much of a singer, but hear me. Cheep cheep."

Then the spring fragrance fills the air, the twilight deepens, the stars appear, and I go into the house. I have been hearing the birds praise God for His goodness and say all their other prayers as well. Instinctively my own heart swells with gratitude, because of the birds' vesper song, and their devotion to the ways of nature and the haunts of man.

CHAPTER VII

THE RED ROGUE

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THE RED ROGUE

THE Red Rogue was a rogue, not because he was red, but because he comes from a roguish and a rascally family, so perhaps it was not so much his fault. If one's forebears have been bad for untold generations it is hard to break away from the habit, so I do not condemn him altogether.

Besides, his badness was only of the mischievous order, with one exception which I will mention later.

I had owned many red squirrels when I was a boy. All of these I caught in a box trap. They were always kept in a cage. Sometimes they died after a long season of captivity, but more frequently I let them go when I had become tired of watching their antics.

But the Red Rogue came to me in quite a different manner. I simply stooped down

under a walnut tree one July afternoon and picked him up in my hand. I took the precaution, however, to put my handkerchief over his head. Many severe nips that I had received in boyhood taught me that precaution.

The Rogue was a half-grown red squirrel. Just what was the matter with him I never determined. Possibly he had fallen and injured himself, or been stunned, for he was rather quiet for a day or two.

A squirrel under normal conditions rarely falls or hurts himself while running and jumping in the tree-tops. They will jump from incredible heights without injuring themselves. I once saw a red squirrel jump from the top of a maple which we estimated was a hundred feet high. He jumped to the top of the farmhouse where I lived when a boy. It was a good seventy-foot jump, but he floated down as gracefully as a dead leaf in autumn.

When a squirrel jumps from a great height he spreads his legs out, and flattens out his body so as to present as much surface as possible to the air. He also seems to fluff up his

fur. His tail he spreads out behind and uses it as a rudder while he falls slowly and gracefully.

Once when John Burroughs was traveling in Mexico he was much impressed with the stories that the natives told him about the ability of the black Mexican squirrel to jump from a great height. The naturalist scoffed at the natives so much that they finally tried an experiment for his benefit. A black squirrel was caught and taken in a bag to the top of a cliff which fell sheer for five hundred feet. They opened the mouth of the bag, while a man stood on either side of it to prevent the squirrel's escape in any way but by jumping. The squirrel looked first at one of his captors and then at the other, and then over the side of the cliff. Without a second's hesitation he took the leap. He was six or eight seconds making the descent, striking gracefully upon a rock. He did not seem to be in the slightest degree injured by his long jump. Any other quadruped, with the exception of the flying squirrel, would have been pounded to jelly.

After examining the Red Rogue carefully to see if I could determine what made him so lifeless, I wrapped him in my handkerchief, put him in my pocket, and took him home.

We had no cat at the time, so he was given the full run of the house, or rather, he took it, for after two or three days he made himself very much at home. His dazed, half-paralyzed condition gave way very shortly to antics and capers, which made the house very lively whenever he was taken with a playful mood.

His principal articles of diet were popcorn, walnuts, peanuts, hard breadcrusts, and several kinds of cereals, such as puffed rice, grape-nuts and the like. We always fed him on top of the old bureau but he often preferred to eat elsewhere, and he would take his breakfast to most unexpected places. We were constantly brushing up his chankings in every part of the house.

It was very pleasant though to see him sit on top of the old bureau and gnaw his way to the heart of a walnut. He always prospected about before attacking a nut, and gnawed into

the meat where the shell was thinnest. How he knew where the shell was the thinnest I do not know. But I have often noticed this fact when examining nuts in the woods that had been partly eaten by squirrels.

I loved best to see him sit on his haunches, his tail cocked saucily over his shoulder, his bright eyes watching my every motion while he scolded and barked away for dear life. I used to imitate his own scolding and barking by putting my lips to the back of my hand and blowing and sucking. This was the way that I had called squirrels when I was a boy.

When I began scolding and barking he would stop for a time and watch me narrowly. Presently he would seem to detect a false note in my performance, then he would set up a great racket, showing me just how it was done.

One of his bad habits was taking all sorts of small articles which he should have let alone and hiding them in most unexpected places. Thus he would gradually scatter the contents of his mistress's work-basket all over the house. If she wanted a ball of darning-cotton, it was

just as apt to be in a pigeonhole in my desk as anywhere else. One day he discovered the button-box and hid its contents in every part of the house. But it was on my desk that he made his worst attacks. I am usually very particular about my desk and do not want things disturbed there, so I often wonder how I ever put up with this small red imp so long. Rubber erasers were his special delight. He did not gnaw them, but he would carry them off and hide them by the half dozen. At least, I had to purchase a whole dozen before I hit upon the scheme of putting them in a drawer that he could not open. Pencils, penholders and other small articles he also tumbled about. It was most annoying to have the contents of a pigeonhole pulled out and scattered about in order that a red rascal might crawl into the small enclosure and go to sleep, but he looked so cute when I discovered him there that I forgave him.

Nor was his mischief confined to the house. Many an unripe butternut he dropped down from the old tree, and one day when he at-

tacked my pear tree and dropped down half a bushel of green pears, I was quite furious, but when I plugged him with some of the green pears, he scampered down the tree and ran up to me to see what it was all about.

Had not his misdemeanors passed from the mischief state to that of a real crime I do not know how long we might have been bothered with him, but his last offense I could not condone, although I had made many excuses for him. This last offense was nothing short of murder.

It was about the first of August. The pair of robins that had builded in an old apple-tree near the house had been very prolific, and had hatched their third brood about a week before. Knowing the murderous tendencies of the red squirrel I had hoped that our pet would not discover them, but I had reckoned wrongly, for his bright eyes seemed to see everything.

One forenoon when I was trying to write, I noticed a great commotion from the robins in the old tree. I at once went to their assistance, thinking that perhaps the grackles or the star-

lings were troubling them, but imagine my disgust to find the Red Rogue sitting on the edge of the nest, deliberately cracking the skulls of the young robins and then dropping the dead fledglings to the ground.

I was angry enough to have had him shot, but I could not bring myself to do that. I had watched him too long, and he had too strong a hold on my affections, so I merely frightened him away and when he was once more in the house I caught him and put him in the cage, where he should have been kept from the first. Such rogues as he should always be behind bars.

He scolded and barked and was very indignant. To his mind we had played a mean trick on him. He had been good as red squirrels go, and we had locked him up like a common criminal.

After this, whenever I looked at him, or whenever I heard him barking or scolding, I plotted to get rid of him. My opportunity came sooner than I had anticipated. A day or two after the Rogue's last offense, I discovered

I Discovered Another Red Squirrel

another red squirrel barking in a distant orchard. I at once took the cage under my arm and set off in the direction of the orchard. I soon discovered the other squirrel. From the dull color of the coat and the shape of the head, I concluded that it was a young female red squirrel. The fates were good to me. Here was a Delilah for my Samson. So I set the cage on the stone wall and let the Rogue listen to the chatter of this, his wild kindred. He was much interested. I presume he had thought he was the only squirrel in the world. Soon he began to chatter himself, and the wild squirrel stopped and listened. Presently the other squirrel started running toward the cage. Then it was that I opened the door and said good-bye to the Red Rogue, not without regret, angry as I was with him. I walked away for a hundred feet and watched to see what would happen.

The Rogue and the stranger ran toward each other until they were about four feet apart then stopped and sat up on their haunches and viewed one another critically. Then the

stranger started slowly along the wall and the Rogue followed. Slowly at first, then faster and faster.

Finally both jumped from the wall and ran up a tree. Back and forth on the branches they raced, having the finest sort of a game of tag. I watched them for half an hour and finally saw them come down the tree. I had expected this, but my interest was in their next move. The stranger was the first to mount the wall. The Red Rogue followed close, and without a second's hesitation she led the way along the stone wall toward the distant woods. The Red Rogue looked back at his empty cage on the wall for a second, then followed. I watched until they were out of sight, then took the empty cage home. I have never seen the Rogue since that day, but I suppose he is living the life of a wild red squirrel. Very improvident, very mischievous, and rather scatterbrained, I presume he occasionally robs birds' nests in the season of fledglings, but as long as I am not responsible for it I do not care so much. Of course I would rather he would be

a respectable citizen of the woods, but he is not wholly bad, so I have forgiven him and remember only his pranks and capers, which certainly made him a most amusing fellow.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ANTICS OF AN ANT HILL

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THE ANTICS OF AN ANT HILL

Probably the most wonderful little people in all nature are the ants. The bees are also wonderful, but I think that the ants are still more interesting. It takes a great deal of study, however, to understand the ants, and to know all their ways. So in this story I will simply tell a very little about them.

My first close acquaintance with a large colony of ants was not pleasant. It was an experience that I long remembered. I was a small boy at the time and had gone to the pasture to pick raspberries. My mother had promised me a quarter of a dollar if I filled my pail, so I was very intent on the berry-picking. This being the case I was not looking out for any ant hills.

I am sure that a city of human beings would

not like to have a great giant, miles tall, come walking upon the very top of their city. Neither did the ants.

I was very intent on reaching some tempting berries which were very large and highly colored. There was a friendly little hillock that would help me to reach them, so I stepped upon it. It was the front gate of the ants' citadel. I presume I broke down the gate and perhaps crushed in the entrance of the central chamber. Anyhow several hundred ant soldiers rushed out to punish me. The ants really do have soldiers trained and very efficient. They certainly were efficient on my legs. A score or two ran up each of my pants legs and began stinging and biting me. With a howl of pain I fled for the brook, which luckily was near by. Here I thrust my legs into a pool and drowned all the attacking army. When I went back for my berry-pail I found that several regiments of ants were drawn up about the gate of their citadel ready to defend it. But I had had enough, so I meekly took my berry-pail to another clump of bushes.

Not only do the ants have soldiers which war upon other ants and bring back captives of which they make slaves, just as the Romans used to do in olden times, but they also have worker ants which do all the work. They build the underground tunnels, bring the food, feed the young and do all sorts of menial work. And speaking of food I must not forget to tell you of two very strange things concerning the ants' food. We all know that the ants' underground tunnels and granaries are all well supplied when the winter comes, but I do not think that many of you know that certain ants are bakers and that they make bread.

They gather a certain seed which is their favorite food. Then the slaves grind it up fine by chewing it. Finally it is kneaded into dough and formed into small cakes and placed in the sun to bake. When it is sufficiently baked it is put away in the underground storehouse for use in the winter. Other seeds are also stored away without baking them. But some of these seeds would sprout and that would spoil them for food were not the ant wise

enough to prevent the seeds from sprouting. This they do in two ways. The first is to bite off the germ so that the seed cannot sprout. Or they will squirt a strong acid into the germ and that kills it. Thus the seed is kept nicely until they are ready to eat it.

Not only do the ants have soldiers and slaves, but they also have guests in their large underground houses. These are certain small crickets which they invite into their tunnels. They feed the crickets, wait upon them and give them the best that they have. They also sometimes invite small beetles to come and live with them. These guests they likewise treat with great dignity. Perhaps the principal reason why the ants love to entertain the beetle is that he gives off a pleasant perfume which they enjoy. So when the ant tunnel gets musty and does not smell sweet, one of the ants will go up to Mr. Beetle and gently stroke his head and he will at once take out the stopper of his scent bottle and the chamber is filled with the sweet perfume.

Still another very strange thing is the fact

that the ants are herdsmen and that they keep cows. Or at least they keep little creatures which give them a sort of milk. These are the green flies known as Aphids.

The ants will catch these little flies and herd them in one of their ant pastures. Whenever the ant wants some milk he will tickle the fly and it at once gives up a sweet sticky milk of which the ant is very fond. In the autumn the ants will drive large droves of these cows into their underground stables where they will keep them and milk them all winter long. I have never heard of their making butter or cheese, but they certainly use the milk and it is an important part of their winter diet.

It is the red ants which make slaves of the black ants. The red ants are more warlike, so they get the best of the black ants.

A red queen who has been fertilized will go into a black ant colony. Here she will live in her cradle and lay a great many eggs. These will of course all hatch red ants. She will make the black ants take care of her eggs and also feed the young red ants until there are a

lot of red ants in the black ant hill. Then the red ants will take charge and make slaves of all the black ants. They will send the black ant army away on the war path and it will come back with scores of black ant prisoners which will all be added to the slaves and workers of the red ant hill. Thus this hill which was originally a black ant hill will in time become a red ant hill or nest, and the black ants will all disappear. All of which illustrates the fact that we should be very careful as to whom we admit to our houses or we may let in the wolf.

These are a very few of the interesting facts about ants. Most of the facts are too technical to be treated in a short story like this. But with their armies and soldiers and slaves, their cows and their select guests, their wonderful building skill and their diligence I claim that the ants are the most interesting little people in the world.

My parting word to you is, "go to the ant, thou sluggard," and learn more of her wonderful ways. The ants certainly put to shame

the efforts of man in almost any direction, when we consider how small they are and what they accomplish.

CHAPTER IX

BUNNYBOY'S DISOBEDIENCE

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Bunnyboy was a half-grown cottontail. He was a grayish brown, although when he was fully grown and the snows of winter had come, he would be entirely white. Mother Nature is very wise in the way she guards her wilderness children. Those who cannot fight she protects in other ways.

So the rabbit, who is the most hunted little creature in the great woods, she colors according to the season. When it is summer and autumn she gives him a brown coat that will fit in well with the brown earth and dead leaves, but when the winter comes and all the earth is white his brown coat will not do at all, for then all his enemies would see it against the white snow, so she changes his coat to white.

Bunnyboy was lying asleep in a clump of bushes. His mother had gone to a distant field

where she knew there were some early cabbages. She had promised the children that if they were good while she was gone she would bring them some cabbage leaves. They had become tired of the leaves and bark that they could find along the edge of the woods, so she had gone to get them something different.

Bunnyboy's brothers and sisters were all asleep in the burrow.

Bunnyboy had wanted to go with his mother but she had not dared to take him.

The farm dog might discover them up in the field, he was always prowling about watching for woodchucks. The wise old rabbit knew that Bunnyboy could not run fast enough to get away from him if he discovered them, so she had left the young rabbit in the woods.

Bunnyboy was her favorite of all the little ones and he wanted to go so badly that she had finally told him he might come outside and hide in a clump of bushes near the burrow while she was gone. This would be almost as good as going with her. So she had found a

thick clump of bushes and after seeing him cuddle up into a brown ball, had left him.

He had slept for a while, but he was a very lively young rabbit, so he finally awoke. He sat up and yawned and wished that his mother had seen fit to take him. He was certainly large enough to go with her.

Why, he could run almost as fast as she could; and as for jumping, he was the greatest jumper in the whole litter. He did not think his mother really knew what a large rabbit he had become, or how well able he was to take care of himself.

He sat very still at the centre of the clump of bushes for a long time.

But it was stupid in there and the outside world was calling to him. So he finally crept very carefully to the outside of the clump of bushes. Then he sat up on his haunches and looked about.

As he sat there with a patch of sunlight falling on his head and shoulders, he was the most beautiful little creature in the whole great woods. His long trumpet-like ears were erect

and listening. When he thought he heard a sound they would twitch this way and that trying to locate it. His eyes were large and very bright. He peered this way and that looking about at all the wonderful things. His pink nose twitched trying to smell out the different scents of the woods.

His mother had given him and the rest of the family many lessons on the danger of the woods. She had taught him to listen and to look and also to smell. So he had these three ways of guarding himself, listening, looking, and smelling.

The woods were very quiet. He was sure that none of his enemies were about. There was no hawk or owl, or fox or weasel in the whole woods.

The forest carpet was fresh and green and he wanted so much to run and frolic. So he took a few hops away from the bush.

Something said to him just as plainly as though his mother had spoken, "Go back, go back!" At first he listened to the voice and went back, but he soon yielded to the lure

of the green woods again and went hopping from point to point. He soon became so interested in the wonderful things about him that he ceased to hear the warning voice.

He hopped upon an old log and ran the length of it, then he jumped into a wonderful clump of green ferns. They were so fresh and green that they intoxicated him. Soon all precaution was forgotten and he was frisking, jumping, and running from place to place and having the very best time that he had ever had in his whole life.

But just in the middle of his most lively frolic a strange scent greeted his nose. It was not like anything that he had ever smelled before. It was not fox or raccoon, or anything that he knew in the woods, so he froze and waited. Freezing is one of the ways in which the wild kindred hide. It means to squat and stay perfectly still. If a rabbit is motionless, it is very hard to distinguish him from the ferns and leaves about. So he froze and waited.

Presently he saw the strangest animal that

he had ever seen coming slowly through the woods. He was a clumsy looking fellow and completely covered with quills. It was Mr. Porcupine, but as Bunnyboy's mother had never happened to be able to show her children a porcupine, he did not know the queer stranger.

Mr. Porcupine did not seem to be looking for young rabbits, in fact he was not looking for anything in particular. He was just rambling through the woods as is his wont.

Bunnyboy kept so still that Mr. Porcupine passed within ten feet of him and did not even see him, but the young rabbit was scared nearly to death. His heart beat so hard that he was afraid the queer fellow would hear it. Finally Mr. Porcupine passed from sight and Bunnyboy was very glad, as he had been terribly frightened. He was so badly scared, in fact, that he decided to go back to his bush at once. He started in the direction that he thought it was, but it was not there. This frightened him so he ran faster and faster, giving great jumps that would have astonished his mother if she

had seen him. He forgot to go carefully as he had been taught, and ran like a jack-rabbit. But the more he ran the further away the bush seemed.

Finally he sat down in a clump of bushes to think. How had he come? What had he seen by the way? Where was the bush? His mother must have returned by this time. She would be very angry with him for running away. What a bad little rabbit he had been. He wished with all his heart that he was back in the burrow with the rest of the litter.

Just at this point in his thoughts he noted a large white round ball sticking to the side of an old log. He had never seen such a ball as that. It was very strange; he would see what it was. His mother had told the rabbit family that whenever they saw anything that was strange to be very cautious in approaching it, or even better to let it alone.

But the spirit of mischief was on Bunnyboy this morning or else he would never have run away. So he approached the ball slowly, stopping to sniff the air and to listen. There was

a strange buzzing sound which came from the ball. He could just hear it. It sounded like flies. He had often amused himself with catching flies. Why, here was a ballful of flies. He would have a fine time. So he went up and sniffed the ball.

At the very first sniff he leaped into the air as though he had been trying to jump a high fence. When he came down he landed upon the ball and this made matters much worse. For the ball was a hornets' nest, and hornets do not like to have rabbits tumbling about their nest, so they swarmed out to punish the intruder. They stung him in the nose and about the eyes. They stung his ears and even his shoulders and back. He ran wildly this way and that with the hornets still stinging him. He plunged into the thickest ferns and rolled and tumbled and finally rubbed them all off, but it was not until he had been stung in half a dozen places. He had been stung once before in his short life, so he knew what it was. His nose, eyes, and ears smarted and burned as though they were afire. He cried and rubbed

them with his paw, but the more he rubbed the worse they got. Finally it began swelling around his eyes and the lids began slowly closing.

This frightened Bunnyboy terribly, and he started running harder than ever. If he could only find his mother and get home before his eyes closed entirely. But he could not find his mother, though he ran until he was ready to drop. Finally his eyes were so nearly closed that he could not see to run.

He scratched his face in the brambles and at last he sat down, entirely lost. His eyelids were now completely closed, and it was all dark around.

Then an awful thought came to him. Now he could not see, all his enemies could get him. The fox could creep up on him. The owl could swoop down upon him. Every sound that he heard filled him with terror. Every time the wind blew in his face he thought it was the wings of the great horned owl. Finally he crawled into a clump of bushes and hid the best he could and lay there trembling and throb-

bing, the most wretched little bunny in the whole world.

He did not know how long he lay there. It seemed like days to him. He did not know whether it was really night or not. It was all dark to him. At last he heard a slight noise. He could still listen, and he was listening with all his might, his long ears twitching this way and that.

The sound was very slight. It was coming toward him. Was it an enemy or a friend? It sounded like a rabbit hopping along the path, but it might be a fox. Bunnyboy listened so hard that he thought he would split his ears. If it was a friend, he did not want to let the sound go by. If it was an enemy, if he made any noise he might be eaten for his pains.

The sounds came very close to him but passed by. He was almost sure that it was a rabbit hopping slowly along the path. But supposing it was a fox? Well, it did not matter much. To be eaten would not be much worse than having his face ache so. So he

cried out, a queer little cry like the cry of the doll that you punch in the stomach.

Then Bunnyboy's mother came bounding along the path toward him. She had almost passed by and missed him; but now, thanks to the wood Nymph who guards all the wood folks, she had found him.

When she saw how terribly he had been punished for his disobedience she did not scold him. He had learned his lesson. She would keep still and let it sink in. So she led him gently down to the brook. She did not lead him as one child leads another, but she went by his side and pushed him this way and that. When he was by the brookside, she made him plunge his face in the cool waters and then rub his nose and face in the mud until they were plastered. She also helped to smear his face with mud. She told him to keep his eyes shut and that tomorrow they would come to the brook and wash the mud off.

When she at last got Bunnyboy back to the burrow he was so muddy and his face so swollen that even his own brothers and sisters did

not know him. But they made a comfortable place for him in the burrow and were very subdued all the rest of the day. All the wise old rabbit said was, "You see, my children, how Bunnyboy's disobedience has been punished. Let it be a warning to you all. Now the rest of you may go out to play."

CHAPTER X

THE ANIMAL SIXTH SENSE

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Some animals and birds and even fishes and seals seem to have a sort of sixth sense which man does not possess. The scientific name for this sense is orientation. This means a sense of direction. These animals have a sort of compass in their heads which, no matter how far they may travel, always points toward home. This is a very fortunate sense, for it prevents their getting lost.

Were you ever lost in the woods? If so, you know what a terrible sensation it is. You rush about frantically trying to find the way out, and the more you rush the more hopelessly you get lost. If you would only sit down quietly and think, or observe, you might find your way out.

Here is a very simple way to get out of the woods when you are lost.

Your reason for being lost is that you are traveling around in a circle. There is an open field somewhere not far distant, but you cannot find it. Here is a simple rule. Pick out a tree in the direction that you think is home and go to it. Then pick out another in the same direction and go to that. Then look back at the first tree and pick out a third in line with these two and go to that. Then keep going in this way, always looking back to your two last trees to keep your direction. This will enable you to travel in a straight line, and before you know it, you are out of the woods. But the animals do not have to do this way. They just know. A fox hound will follow a fox all day long, winding in and out. At night he may be many miles from home, but he does not have to wander about to find his home. He just points his nose toward his master's house and travels for home as fast as his legs will carry him.

A friend of mine was once hopelessly lost in the Rockies. He drove his horse for hours toward what he thought was camp, but did not

find it. Finally he gave the wise horse his head and he started off in a direction which the hunter thought would land them still further from camp. But not so. The faithful animal soon trotted into camp to the great astonishment of his rider.

Even such stupid things as fishes seem to possess this instinct. The herring which are hatched in some pond or river along the coast will go hundreds of miles to sea ranging about until they are fully grown. Then when it is their turn to spawn, they will turn their noses toward the old spawning bed and come swarming up the stream or river until they nearly choke it. The great silver salmon of the streams in Alaska always return to the old spawning bed each season. When these fish went to sea they were merely minnows. But they come back as full-grown salmon, many of them weighing twenty or thirty pounds, yet they have not forgotten the place where they were hatched.

The seals, which are also born along the islands of the Alaskan coast, can always find the

way home. In the summer they will swim far to seaward, following the cold currents southward, but when the call of nature comes, they obey it and find their way back to the home rookeries.

Who can say by what instinct a little bird no larger than a butternut finds his way across a continent, braving wind and storms, always sure of his direction and never lost? The bluebirds will say good-bye in the autumn when the last dead leaf has fallen. But the same brave little fellow will say hullo again in the spring. He is just as bright and beautiful as he was when he went away and even more so, for now he brings the hope of spring with him and then he foretold the winter.

The King Gander who leads the great flock southward each year needs neither compass nor map. I presume, though, that he follows the watercourses, and most of them lead southward, but even so, he still needs a good compass to guide him in storms or in fogs. He travels just as well in the darkest night as by daylight, because the home instinct guides him.

I have purposely kept the best example of the homing instinct until the last. That is the homing pigeon, the beautiful, brave bird whose heart is always singing "home, home," whose one instinct is the home cote.

The other day the government released one of those wonderful birds in Chicago. The mayor of that city placed a message for President Harding in the tube upon the bird's leg. Fourteen hours later the message had been delivered at the White House and the faithful messenger was pecking grain in the home cote, the average mileage being forty-five miles per hour, which is fast for so long a flight. These swift messengers will deliver a message within fifty or sixty miles, flying at the rate of a mile a minute.

No one can estimate how many lives of soldiers these birds saved during the great war. One faithful pigeon, with his leg shot off, but still hale and hearty, is wearing a Croix de Guerre as a token of faithful service. A part of the regiment with which he was detailed to fight was cut off in the Argonne Forest. It

was known as the Lost Battalion. For five days the men battled against terrible odds. Their food and water gave out and finally their ammunition as well. They had dug into a sandy bank. Their friends thought them all dead. So both Germans and their own troops were shelling the side hill. Men tried to get word to their base line, but they were all killed in the attempt. As a last resort, four pigeons were released one after another, and all met the same fate. Finally, the last pigeon was thrown into the air, but a bullet struck him before he was ten feet away. He reeled and fluttered and seemed about to fall. But he sensed the call of his mate and the nest, the home cote. With a mighty effort he summoned all his remaining strength and flew away. Half an hour later he delivered the message to the commanding general and the Lost Battalion was saved through the heroism of a homing pigeon.

CHAPTER XI

A CRADLE IN THE TREE TOP

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About the only real rock-a-bye baby I know of is the young oriole as it swings to and fro in its wonderful horsehair nest at the end of an elm bough. The gray squirrel, in the autumn or winter, is also something of a rock-a-bye baby as he swings in his leaf nest in the fork of a high tree. But I think the Mother Goose rhymes must have referred to the oriole.

For several years Sunbeam and Sweetheart, a pair of Baltimore orioles, have swung their wonderful nest from an elm-tree in my door-yard, so I am very well acquainted with them and we are on the best of terms. I usually help them a bit in nest-building time and that is perhaps why we are such good friends.

Over two hundred years ago Lord Baltimore, an Englishman, wished to establish a colony for himself and his friends in the new world. He first selected Newfoundland, but

for his colony that cold and bleak country was a great failure. So he finally went to Maryland, Virginia, to look about for a new place for his colony. He was sick and discouraged. But when he beheld the birds in the forests of Maryland he decided at once that he would move his colony there. Especially was he attracted by our little hangbird. The bright color of this little fellow and his blithe song so cheered him that he changed the colors of his house to Orange and Black, the color of the oriole. So he adopted the bird's color, and the bird now bears his name—a fair exchange.

Sunbeam, the male oriole, is the most punctual little chap that I know of in birdland. I have kept a calendar of his spring arrival for many years. On the morning of the seventh of May, be it sunshiny or rainy, I always look for him, and he rarely disappoints me. I am convinced from the fact that he arrives so punctually that he must keep a bird calendar of his own. He is ever the same little Sunbeam, and my heart always warms when I see him. A flash of fire across the lawn, and a blithe, chat-

tering flood of song pouring out behind. He is so full of song that he has to sing even when flying, just as the bobolink does.

Sunbeam guards the old elm tree very jealously until Sweetheart comes. He is something of an aristocrat and he does not want too many vulgar birds building in his own particular tree. Sweetheart is coming north more leisurely, traveling with a large flock of female orioles. Sunbeam does not do anything about their house until she arrives. I suppose he thinks that she might upset all his plans if he did. So he just amuses himself with scrapping with cock robin and the bluebird, and singing and winging hither and thither.

I am always glad when Sweetheart arrives and they can get to nest building. Of all the birds in North America they are the most skillful nest-builders. Sunbeam sometimes helps with the nest, but Sweetheart is the master builder. It is she who selects the graceful bough on the elm where they will hang the nest. It is usually a small branch perhaps half an inch in diameter, one that will swing freely

when the wind blows. Their favorite weaving material is horsehair. This is very strong and the best possible thing that they can use. But sometimes it is hard to find and they have to use milkweed fiber and also fiber from elm-bark. I used to place strong thread and silk where they could find it. Once I placed a lot of gaily colored worsted for them and they had the gayest sort of a nest. This beautiful little home is about seven inches deep and held to the branch by countless threads. At the bottom it is large, to make room for the nest. At the top it is nearly closed, to hide Sweetheart as she sits upon the eggs.

The weaving in this nest is wonderful. It is so close that rain cannot penetrate it, and yet it gives a free circulation for the air. No malicious bird like the starling or cuckoo can prey upon this home. I have never known but one Baltimore oriole nest to come to grief, and that was blown down by a terrible wind. Even then the branch on which it was hung broke and fell to the ground.

As soon as the nest is ready, Sweetheart lays

from four to six light-colored eggs splashed with dark markings. Then for two weeks she spends most of her time in the nest while Sunbeam has to feed her with caterpillars and grubs. The orioles are a great help to man, as they eat countless destructive worms and grubs which hurt the trees and shrubs.

A French naturalist has estimated that if the birds were all to disappear man could live on the earth only nine years, for without the birds, the plants, trees and vegetables would disappear. They would be eaten up by the worms and bugs. Then the cattle and sheep would not have any feed and they would all die. So man himself would have to live upon fish, which would be very bad for him.

When the young orioles were finally hatched, Sunbeam and Sweetheart would spend nearly the whole day carrying them worms and bugs. But even then Sunbeam would still find time to sing.

The young orioles never leave the nest until they can fly, so they are rarely caught by cats. Such good care do these songsters take of

themselves that I have never seen a dead oriole. After the young orioles had become nearly grown it was a gay company that flitted about the old elm. Sunbeam still sang some, but he was very busy looking out for his family and keeping the young birds out of danger. The oriole is one of the last of the song-birds to come north, and he is one of the first to go back south, so we have to make the most of him while we have him. Faithful little Bluebird is one of the first to come and the last to go, which shows how much he loves us. With Oriole it is quite different. He is a gay little fellow. He loves the sunshine and the flowers, so in September when the flowers have faded and the birds have ceased to sing, he gathers his family together and they all fly away to Maryland. We never see them go, so perhaps they leave in the night, or very early in the morning. All we know is that some morning we miss them from the dooryard and we are sad because of their going. But we always wish them good luck and look forward to their return the seventh of next May. The empty nest still

swings on the slim bough and we have the memory of their beauty and joy to cheer us in the cold winter.

So here's luck to you, Sunbeam and Sweetheart, as you fly away southward. May you escape the pot-hunters in the large cities on the way, the ignorant men and boys who hunt song-birds for a bird pie. May you escape every danger by the way and come back to us again next spring as gay coated and sweet of song as ever.

CHAPTER XII

RUFF

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RUFF

THE old drumming log near which Ruff was hatched was down in the pasture behind the old farmhouse where I lived as a boy. It was about half a mile from the house, but on clear spring mornings when the wind was right I often heard the old cock partridge drumming. The sound that this wary bird makes is so loud that one can hear it a long ways off.

I presume my young reader may not know what it is that the cock partridge does when he drums, so I will tell him. Perhaps he has thought that he had a real drum on which he whacked, but that is not the case. In the early spring at mating time the cock partridge finds an old fallen log, one that is clear from brush and moss, and he calls this his own particular drumming log, and woe to any other cock partridge who might try to drum on it.

Ruff's father first began drumming about the middle of April. This was to call a mate. When the lady partridge hears a cock drumming she knows that he is calling in partridge language for her to come to him and be his mate.

The cock partridge often has to drum for several days before he gets his mate, for the lady partridges are coquettish and have to be wooed just like the rest of the sex. When the cock partridge drums he stands erect on his log, swells his breast out to its full capacity and with his strong wings beats a loud tattoo on his breast and sides. At first his wings strike slowly, but finally he beats so fast that you could not see the wings, just a great mass of flying feathers. At last the lady partridge comes at his call and he jumps down from his log and runs to greet her. Then they are very friendly for several days, looking about for a good place for the nest and courting. They usually find a spot under a fallen tree top and Mrs. Partridge lays about a dozen eggs. When the eggs are all laid she begins sitting.

The eggs will hatch within two or three weeks. When they are finally hatched it is a very lively brood of chicks which she presents to the old cock partridge. The same day that they are hatched they leave the nest, and run about, and begin feeding on plant lice which are so small one can hardly see them. These will be very well for several weeks, but they finally graduate from plant lice and go to eating grubs. When a partridge chick is two weeks old it looks for all the world like a brown leghorn chick of the same age. I have often seen the old partridge and her chicks in the woods. They are very hard to catch. I have several times caught them, but it was only after a long chase. When these chicks are young, through the day they will follow their mother about picking plant lice, but each night the wise old bird finds a safe place under a log, or some thick brush and broods them under her wings just as a hen will her chickens.

There are many dangers in the great woods, so the mother bird has to sleep with one eye open, as they say. The fox may come prowl-

ing about. He would gobble up the whole brood, mother and all, if he could find them. The raccoon is just as bad, only he is more clumsy and easier to avoid. Then hawks and owls are on the lookout for partridges, but they will be more apt to get them when they are larger and roost in the trees at night.

When the chicks are small, there are often very heavy rains, and if the mother is brooding them in a low place sometimes they are drowned, or they get chilled, and die. A little later on they are liable to have grubs in the head, and these are also fatal. Sometimes in July they will all become very stupid and will stand about and not care to eat. Then their mother knows they need medicine and she will lead them away to some very bad tasting berries and make them eat a lot of them. After this they feel better.

When Ruff's brothers and sisters were half grown I used to see them in the blackberry bushes along the edge of the woods. There had been twelve eggs and all hatched, but by this time there were but nine in the brood. The

rains had killed two, and one had died from ticks. In October I saw them again in the beech woods, where I had gone for nuts. The partridges had also gone there for nuts and they had grown considerably since I saw them in the blackberry bushes. They were now nearly as large as their mother. When they flew one after another they made a great noise with their whirring wings.

In November the partridges all act very strangely, and this is called the mad moon for the partridges. Then it is that the brood breaks up and each partridge goes his own way. Partridges will often fly close to the houses during the mad moon. It was during the mad moon that I caught Ruff in my hands. This was a very remarkable thing, as the partridge is the shyest of birds. I was on my way to school and I found him lying on the ground under a telephone wire. He was not dead but stunned. He had been flying about in the foolish way that partridges have when the mad moon is on and had not noticed the wire. Bang he went into it and fell to the ground. I came

along just in time to pick him up. I took him home and put him in an old chicken coop after nailing wire netting over the front of it so he could not get out.

He was very wild and shy. We kept him for nearly a month, but I do not think he would ever have been tamed. He would finally eat his corn or oats when no one was looking. When we came to see him he would go in the farthest corner of his coop and crouch down as though scared to death. My father said we could not tame him and we finally decided to let him go. The whole family came out to see him off. After some difficulty I caught him and took him struggling to the back yard. Here I set him down on the snow. For a few seconds he crouched as though uncertain. Then he ran a few steps to get a good start and with a roar of wings he was off. The last I saw of him he was sailing away toward the spruce woods and the old drumming log.

I do not know what became of him. If he escaped the owls, the hawks, the wildcat and the hunters, perhaps he reared his own brood of

I Set Him Down on the Snow

chicks the next spring. But one thing was certain, we never saw him again. He had gone back to the wild where he belonged. Some of the wild creatures can be tamed, but the partridge usually remains wild all his days, so the great woods is the place for him.

CHAPTER XIII

BRIGHT EYES AND HOW TO SEE WITH THEM

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It is one thing to have bright eyes, or seeing eyes, and quite another to see with them. A boy or girl may have the keenest kind of eyesight and yet miss half that goes on in field and woods. This is both because they do not know how to see and also because they do not know where to look for the wonders and mysteries of nature.

The animals and birds have a way of blending with the landscape that is baffling to any but trained eyes. This is very necessary for them, as they depend upon this fact to shield them from their enemies.

From the moment that the first bluebird perches upon the top of the old elm and announces that spring is coming, until he flies away in the autumn, there is always something interesting to see in field and forest.

But the wonders of nature do not cease even then, for the winter also has its woodland secrets, many of which are most interesting.

It is a very pleasant pastime to keep a bird calendar and notice each new arrival. This keeps one always on the lookout, and before you know it, you have gained a great deal of knowledge about our little feathered friends.

Most of the common song-birds can be observed in villages or near houses, as the birds seem to consider themselves the friends of man.

For the thrushes and the bobolink one will have to go further afield, but he will be well rewarded for his pains.

An old apple orchard is also a good place to observe birds and there are several species to be found there which do not frequent the village street. Barns and bridges likewise attract swallows and fly-catchers. It is a very easy task to identify seventy-five of the more common species of birds between March first and the middle of May without going far afield.

After identifying each species, it is well to note the difference between the markings of the male and the female. As a general rule, the male bird is more gorgeous than the female. In the human species, the female wears all the fine feathers, but not so with the birds where the males wear the fine feathers and also do all the singing.

Many of the birds may be told simply by their flight when they are so far distant that one can barely see them. Thus it is that the woodpeckers gallop, the hawks sail, the swallows skim and dart. So it is often a very slight thing that gives the clue to the identity of the bird.

It is very pleasant to know all the bird songs. Here a single note will often betray the bird, although he may be hidden away in the deepest thicket.

Squirrels are harder to discern among the tree tops than are birds, for their neutral-tinted coats blend readily with bark and foliage. The squirrel has acquired the trick of keeping perfectly still if he knows you are searching for

him and that makes him much harder to discover.

A rabbit is also hard to see because he is brown in summer and autumn and white in winter, so he fades into the landscape perfectly.

This is nature's special care for him, for he is the most hunted little creature in the great woods.

Partridge, quail, and woodcock also call for a trained eye in order to get a good view of these shy birds. But if you were to start out to locate them you might tramp for half a day without seeing them.

The same rule of bright eyes applies to the fishes and other creatures in the water. One boy can spot a pickerel in the pickerel grass where another will look for several minutes before he sees it, even after it has been pointed out to him.

Hiding by this simple means is a fine art and all the wild creatures have it to perfection.

Usually the mouths of the burrows of foxes, rabbits, and woodchucks are carefully hidden, although the woodchuck is not so particular as

The Woodchuck is Not Particular

the others. The chipmunk is very foxy about his burrow. He will dig his burrow under the roots of an old tree and make a second door coming out under a root or under a convenient sod. Then he will carefully close up his first door, and use only the second.

If you wish to see things in the woods, the very best way is to sit perfectly still and let the wild kindred come to you. If you go blundering along looking for them, there are ten chances to one that they will see you first and when you do appear, they will be cleverly hidden so you will not see them at all. So go into the woods and sit down under a tall tree and look and listen.

If it is in the squirrel country and in the autumn, presently you will hear the squirrels dropping down maple seeds, or perhaps nuts. Soon you will see a quiver along the limb, and Mr. Squirrel will run the length of the limb, and jump to another perch.

You may hear a soft pitter-patter in the dead leaves and a rabbit will come hopping shyly along. Or even a cock partridge may strut

into view. These are rare sights, but there are countless shy curious little birds who will come flying from tree to tree to inspect you. They are half afraid, yet very curious. You are a stranger in their woods and they want to know who you are and what you are doing.

Boys often call the crows about by imitating their calls. Thus they can often call dozens of these shy rogues into the tree tops above them.

The barking and scolding of the red squirrel may be imitated by placing your lips on the back of your hand and blowing and sucking rapidly. In this way, one can also imitate the squeak of the field-mouse.

In the winter time, there is not so much to see, but the telltale tracks that the wood folk leave in the new snow are most interesting. I have often read strange tragedies in the new snow. Stories that were just as plain to my trained eyes as though I had seen the action.

Thus the bright eyes seeking after woodcraft, soon learn to tell the two-by-two track of the squirrel, the T shaped track of the rabbit, the businesslike straightaway track

of the fox, the scraggly track of the partridge, and the tiny lace-like track of the wood-mouse.

The winter sounds that you may hear when the weather is clear and warm are also interesting. Two or three species of woodpeckers winter with us, and their clear nasal "snip" is often heard, as well as their "rat-a-tat-tat," whacking upon dead limbs. The call of a jay or cawing of crows often breaks the winter stillness, while at night, the barking of a fox or the hooting of an owl gives an eerie sound between the moaning of the wind and the creaking of great branches upon the leafless trees.

Thus each season has its pictures and its sounds. It only remains for us to see and hear them. It is a great art to possess the seeing eye, and a boy who can see things afield is always admired by his fellows.

To see the wild kindred and to know them when you see them; to love them and protect them, these are among the great blessings of boyhood. So keep your eyes open, boys and girls, for all are learning woodcraft in these

days of Boy Scouts and Camp-fire Girls. Keep your eyes open and your hearts as well and you will be richly rewarded for your study of the great book of nature.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GRAY SQUADRON

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LAKE LONELY was what its name implies, a lonely lake up in Labrador, which is certainly a lonely country. It was the summer breeding ground of the Gray Squadron. It had been the summer quarters for the Canada wild goose for untold ages, but at the time of our story, their numbers had somewhat diminished, so there were about a hundred geese upon the lake. It was beautifully situated with woods upon one side and open country on the other. Feed was always abundant, and it was far from the haunts of men. Of course there were the natural enemies such as mink and the fox to combat, also the elements, but altogether it was an ideal breeding place.

The Gray Squadron had come back to the lake the April before with its ranks badly de-

pleted. On the way south, in the autumn they had lost nearly a score of their numbers by running into a hunting party, when the flock was flying low. The pot-hunters along the Carolina coast where they had wintered had taken twice as many more, so that it was barely a score of these splendid birds that had come back in April.

If the hunters only appreciated the fact that when they bag one wild goose in the spring, out of season, they rob the flock of a full brood, they would think before they shoot. But it is the way of the prodigal American to waste much more than he uses.

The Gray Squadron had spent a profitable summer and its number was now recruited to one hundred and four members, made up of ten new broods and about a dozen old birds.

Hitherto the flock had been led on the southward flight by an old gray veteran, but his last autumn experience had put him in bad with the ganders who led each of the individual flocks. These birds were a sort of cabinet or heads of departments for the leader. So it

had happened that on the day of which I write, the last day of November, there had been tumult and turmoil around the lake all day long. This had been over the leadership of the flock for the pending flight.

The old leader was certainly out of the question. This had been demonstrated when one of the under ganders had thrashed him so soundly that he was now nursing a broken wing and a bruised and bleeding head, in the reeds along one of the inlets of the lake. After the old leader had been disposed of, there had been other battles for the leadership, not so furious as the first, but still strenuous. In the wild it is the strongest that always dominates and leads, so a mammoth gander who had always bullied the old leader made himself commodore of the Gray Squadron and his rivals assented. Now in the gathering twilight he was making ready to lead the flight southward. On a dozen sand spits along the lake, as many small flocks were assembled ready for the word to fall in.

The start was preceded by a great squawk-

ing and calling of the leaders one to another, but only four or five old ganders had yet taken to the air. Finally even these descended and took their places, each at the head of his particular brood. For five minutes perfect silence reigned. Then the leader of the flock arose in air and circled away to the north. At the head of the lake it formed into the wedge shape with the old gander at the point and five geese on either leg. Slowly this apex flock circled down one side of the lake and up the other. There was no command or call: "Fall in, Company B," but at a certain point, another flock arose in air and joined itself to the right leg of the flock. The next flock joined upon the left side as quickly and as perfectly as trained soldiers. So on the flock went circling the lake until the entire one hundred and four geese had been formed into one great squadron, as symmetrical and perfect a V as had been the first small flock. Then their leader turned the point to the southward and they were off for the autumn migration to the winter quarters along the Carolina coast. They rose easily to an alti-

tude of about three hundred feet. This was well up out of shotgun reach. True, occasional ambitious hunters would take a shot at them at this altitude, but no harm was done. It was a magnificent sight, as the Gray Squadron swept away southward, flying with strong, even strokes, the most wonderful flying machine in nature.

As long as the daylight lasted, they flew rather silently, but when darkness settled down they talked to each other, or at least that was what it sounded like. One might have heard low, sleepy squawks all along the line. These came at regular intervals and were signal sounds to keep the flock together and flying at a uniform altitude. The great danger in flying at night is that they might get to flying too low and collide with church steeples or other high and dangerous obstructions. But usually their sense of approaching obstacles would save them from a disaster of the kind; still such things have happened.

My reader may wonder how, in perfect darkness, without a compass or chart, the admiral

could hold the Gray Squadron so perfectly to its course. I am not sure. It is probably done by several powers which man does not possess. A sort of homing instinct. A sense of direction which does not depend upon compass or map. The air currents probably also help, but I think it is more instinct than anything else.

If one could have trained an opera glass upon the Flying Squadron as it cleaved the Labrador sky on that November twilight, it would have disclosed a wonderful sight. One hundred and four of the largest American game birds, with the exception of the wild turkey, each holding his place perfectly in the wedge-shape formation, flying about a rod apart, with strong, steady wing strokes, each with his long black neck stretched out in front of him like a race-horse, showing plainly the white crescent at the throat and with the legs drawn up well under to escape the rush of the wind. Such was this bird cyclone of the sky cleaving the twilight air at the rate of fifty-five or sixty miles an hour. Far beneath, the Lab-

rador wilderness floated rapidly by, field, forests, lakes and rivers, all seeming to flow northward like a mighty moving picture. For the first hour, or until twilight fell, there was very little civilization to be seen, then straggling fishing villages and an occasional country road came into view. At last the town back of the only good harbor that the desolate country possessed was past and the flock was winging over Newfoundland. By midnight they were well into New Brunswick and nearing the Maine State line. As the flying V crossed the international boundary between the United States and Canada a long streak of bright light was seen upon the earth beneath. It was a train upon the Maine Shore line. For a while the train and the flock went parallel; the Flying Squadron was much too fast for the express, and it was soon left far behind. On down the Maine coast they sped. Here they ran into a strong south wind and a snow squall, but it did not deter this wonderful flying machine. It swept on, not quite so fast, but still going strong at forty miles an hour. By daylight,

the flock crossed Casco Bay and Portland harbor.

Early risers on the islands heard the wild exultant slogan of the water fowl, "Honk, honk, honk." They rubbed their sleepy eyes and looked upward. For thirty seconds, or perhaps a minute, they could follow the flying V as it swept on toward the New Hampshire line. By eight o'clock the Squadron turned inland and all alighted upon a small wood-screened lake. Here they fed and rested during the day. As good luck would have it, no hunter discovered them, so they recuperated, and by night were as fresh as they had been the night before. Once again the leader of the flock rose in air and circled about the lake, picking up in turn each of the small flocks until the great formation had been again secured. Then he headed his splendid flying machine back toward the sea and it came rushing on down the New Hampshire coast. By eight o'clock it had passed into Massachusetts. On down the Massachusetts coast they flew, passing over Boston harbor by ten o'clock. They

cut the Cape just as the present canal does and headed straight for Narragansett Bay. Providence and Newport did not see them, but late pedestrians might have heard the faint wild cry far above if they had been upon the street to listen.

Then they turned westward along the Connecticut coast. At the western end of Long Island they headed for the New Jersey coast. Three o'clock found them passing above Atlantic City heading for Delaware Bay. In the early morning hours just at sunrise, they stopped for an hour to feed and rest in the bay, then they took wing again and sped on. The homing instinct was growing stronger and stronger each hour in the mind of the old leader. Ordinarily he might have rested for another night in southern Delaware, but this was the land of duck hunters and the flock sensed its danger. They now mounted to a greater height than they had thus far maintained, perhaps half a mile, where they were well out of danger.

Chesapeake Bay was crossed and they

glimpsed Washington without even knowing, for to the Flying Squadron all cities looked alike.

On down the Virginia coast the flying wedge swept. All through the forenoon they flew steadily. By noon they again stopped for an hour near the Carolina boundary to rest and feed. But it was only a brief stop. The winter quarters had not been reached yet, so the commodore still led them on. By the middle of the afternoon the flock wheeled at the mouth of one of the rivers that flows from North Carolina into the Atlantic Ocean and headed for a large island twenty miles to sea. Here, half an hour later, they came to their long journey's end.

The Flying Squadron was not spent, but tired. It could have taken to the air again and flown another thousand miles if necessary, but they had reached their winter quarters and so they rested, well content.

The Flying Squadron had covered something like two thousand miles in two and a half days, so why not rest?

There in the warm islands of the Atlantic we will leave them until the first of April, when we may again hear the stirring slogan of the Canadian wild goose as the flying wedge again cleaves the spring sky on its way northward. And when it does pass, I, for one, if I am fortunate enough to hear it, will take off my hat and wish them all good luck on the northward flight.

CHAPTER XV

JOYOUS AUTUMN DAYS

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To the normal country boy, keen eyed, strong of limb, and full of the zest of living, every season of the year is the best season ever.

When the fifteenth of April comes, and he digs some angleworms and takes his fish-pole and goes away to the little alder-fringed trout brook, to renew his acquaintance with the Kingfisher, he thinks that spring is the best time of year. When summer comes with her full tide of life and he goes away to the pasture to pick wild strawberries, or blueberries, he votes for summer-time. When autumn comes and the nuts hang ripe on chestnut and butternut tree and he vies with the squirrels for the ripe nuts, he declares for autumn. But when winter comes with its skating and coasting, its fresh invigorating winds, with snowballing and snow forts, he is quite sure that winter is the best season of the year.

Wise little philosopher that he is, he takes life very much as he finds it and squeezes out a full cup of joy from each passing season.

So long as he is just a boy, it does not matter what the wind or weather bring.

To scuff in the dead leaves, and kick up great clouds of them while their sweet sad scent fills the nostrils, is a deep satisfaction, but boyhood's joys are more dramatic. This is more of a girl's pastime. To go away for a day's hard work in the chestnut or butternut grove, or even to gather beechnuts, is more to his liking.

It is dizzy work climbing the high chestnuts and then holding on with one hand, while with the other one pulls off the hard-sticking burrs. The first frosts help some, but if one would be ahead of the squirrels he will have to use a pole. The beechnuts stick so hard that the best method is to saw off a convenient limb, and then strip it leisurely.

How the squirrels run up and down the trees, barking and scolding as you work. This applies especially to the red squirrel. The

gray takes it as a matter of course, or at least he never says anything, but the red squirrel considers he owns the whole woods. Chippy, too, is quite disturbed, but he does not scold as the red squirrel does. You may have sawed off the very limb from which he was filling his winter pantry, but he will find another.

Out on the cranberry bog, the sour, red berries are very plentiful.

The gray moss gives under the feet as one moves from hillock to hillock. There is always just enough excitement about it to keep up the interest. There are legends that certain places in the bog are treacherous. Just the right spot might let one in out of sight. I have never known of any one being lost in that way on our own particular bog, but there is the legend.

Still more exciting than these harmless frolics in the autumn woods was raccoon hunting, in which the boys always joined in my boyhood.

With the faithful coon dog on a leash, and with lanterns, the start was made. There were always shadows enough to make it rather scary,

and the hooting and laughing of the owls gave an added thrill. We skirted all the cornfields before letting the dog go. That was our best chance to find a fresh coon track.

Our excuse for hunting the raccoon was that he raided the hen-coops, scooped out the insides of the pumpkins, and did considerable damage to other vegetables. Of course, Mr. Raccoon had to live, but we did not think of that.

If we were lucky enough to tree a coon, then the fun began. He had to be either shaken or frightened out of the tree, or perhaps the tree had to be cut down. A very wasteful performance, as one good tree is worth many coon-skins, or even Mr. Raccoon himself, delicious as he is, baked with sweet potatoes and served in the most approved manner.

If we were unlucky and did not start a coon, we made the best of it by going to a near-by cornfield and picking some corn that was still in the milk. This we would roast around a blazing campfire, where we would stay until the small hours of the morning, eating roast corn and ripe apples and telling stories.

What a grown-up feeling it gives a boy to let himself in at the back door at two o'clock in the morning, after a coon hunt, only the boy knows.

There is a special halo that surrounds Thanksgiving day in the country. With what zest the normal country boy enters into this glad festal day.

He does not like picking chickens and turkeys, but he does his part at that fussy work.

There is more fun in cracking the nuts, and getting the largest, reddest apples and polishing them to make them shine and selecting the largest bunches of grapes from the storehouse. Then to put in the last two hours before dinner in just loafing about, smelling the tantalizing odors.

Going away to the great woods to cut the Christmas tree does not really come under the pleasures of autumn, but I always associate that sacred duty with this season of the year. If it is a green Christmas and the day is warm, it may still look quite like autumn, but more frequently there is snow on the ground.

You always know that particular tree for the Christmas tree the moment you set eyes on it. Perhaps you have been looking for an hour.

Some of the trees which you inspect are too tall and some too short. Some are crooked while others do not branch enough.

There is always a special look to the Christmas tree, that no other tree has. It is preferably a spruce or hemlock. A pine is too sticky and it sheds its needles badly, so Mother has decreed against it, because it litters up the house.

The Christmas tree must be just tall enough to stand erect in the living-room, and it must be conical in shape, large at the bottom, and with a fine point at the top. It must have a great many small limbs to hang presents on.

I used to wonder, as I chopped the Christmas tree down, if it knew it was going to be the Christmas tree as it grew. If so, did that fact discourage it, or was it joy enough just to be a Christmas tree?

I often wondered if the trees ever got to

talking in tree language, just as they do when the wind whispers softly in their branches. Perhaps one would say, "Ho, I am going to be the Christmas tree. I am going up to the house and help celebrate the glad day when I am tall enough."

"A fine stunt that is," another would retort, a crooked little tree which could never serve in that capacity. "You will be cut down for your pains. You will die and that will be the end of you."

"Oh, well, I don't care," the future Christmas tree would reply, softly sighing in all its needles. "I will have had one glad time. And they will keep me for a long time just to look at and talk about me for months and tell how beautiful I was."

The boy never feels quite so much the man in after years as he does the day he drags home the Christmas tree and all his smaller brothers and sisters run shouting to greet him. He is bringing home the woods, its fragrance and its sentient life, its mystery and its peace, to beautify the home for a brief season.

So here's to you, brave little Christmas tree, giving your own fragrant life for the joy of others.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CROW CONVENTION

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It was a clear, crisp day about the middle of September. The sky was clear as though Dame Nature had swept it with a broom. The air was fragrant with ripe fruit and dead leaves. The lap of Mother Nature was filled to overflowing with the good things of earth. Well she had redeemed the promises of spring and summer. It was a day to make the heart glad and one to remember when the snow lay white on the fields.

It was the day of the crow convention. The forty-fifth division of the Crow's Association of North America were having their annual convention in Farmer Brown's sugar orchard. I presume that every black rogue of them thought the day had been made especially for him.

Ever since early morning crow scouts had been flying across the country assembling the

clan. And since about noon they had been gathering at the sugar bush. You could see them coming by twos and threes, flying leisurely, as is the way of crows. The sugar orchard, which was a large grove of several hundred rock maples, was splendidly adapted for such a gathering. The leaves were still thick enough on the trees to afford a screen for the proceedings. This grove was set apart from the rest of the woods, so that, by placing half a dozen sentries on the outskirts of the grove, they could be sure that they would not be surprised by any hunters. Not that any hunter would ever want to shoot a crow to eat, "eating crow" being a proverb referring to anything that is very unpalatable. But crows are such rascals that hunters often go out of their way to shoot them.

By three o'clock in the afternoon they had all assembled. The trees for an acre were black with them, old crows and young crows, shiny black crows and rusty crows, crows just hatched that spring, and crows who could boast a score of years at least. Most of them were

rather quiet. Occasionally a young crow would try his voice, though he was usually reprimanded rather severely by his elders. The orders were to keep quiet, but when the meeting had once been opened it was hard to keep quiet. There were usually many exciting things to discuss.

Sometimes they disagreed and had to express their minds forcefully. Then, too, they occasionally had to express themselves with one accord, just as a crowd of boys do when they give three cheers.

When the scouts had reported that they could see no more crows coming across the fields, the meeting was opened by the president, a very dignified black old crow, who was supposed to be the wisest crow in the clan. One reason for his wisdom was that he had been captured by a farmer when he was young. He had lived for several months with the farmer's family so he had learned many of their ways. He had also acquired several words of their speech which he often quoted, to the great admiration of his fellows. In short, he was what

you might call an educated crow. He knew not only all that the rest of the crows did but he had a sort of crow college education besides. Thus he was able to tell the clan what the farmer would do under certain provocation. He knew traps, poison, scarecrows and fire-arms, so he was a most valuable president and leader. The clan knew this and they held him in great esteem.

When it was time to open the convention, the old crow mounted to the top of a very high maple, where he was plainly seen by all the clan, and addressed them in crow language.

"It gives me great pleasure, Crow ladies and gentlemen," he said, "to call this convention to order. It is the tenth convention that I have presided over since I took the leadership of the clan. You certainly have prospered under my leadership."

"Caw, caw, caw," came from every hand. This meant, "Yes, yes, yes, we have," in crow language.

The old crow stood a little straighter on his perch and continued. "I have certainly saved

many of your scalps, for I have taught you the wisdom of men. If you are to fight men, you must know their ways and their thoughts as well as their language. You bet." This latter phrase was given in English by the president to the great astonishment of the young crows and the delight of the older ones. A caw of approval ran like a ripple through the maples.

"Yes, I have led you wisely, but there are still several things that I want to call your attention to. The most important of these is the robbing of birds' nests in the villages close to the houses. It must stop at once."

"How can we live if we don't rob birds' nests?" croaked a rusty old crow. "I have to have bird's eggs in the early spring to keep my coat black."

"It don't keep it very black, grandpa," sneered a sleek fellow close to the president.

"Wait until you are as old as I am," croaked grandpa. "I don't believe you will have even a tail feather left."

"Silence, silence," cawed the chairman. "Don't quarrel and don't interrupt me. I re-

peat what I have already said. The robbing of birds' nests in the villages must cease at once, or something will happen that will make this clan look like a blackbird's funeral. Listen to me. The other day I was roosting in the old pine close to the house where I used to live. I occasionally go there and listen to the talk. I can often pick up valuable information.

"Billy Brown was telling Mr. Brown that there was talk of putting a bounty on us crows, because we killed so many young birds. Do you know what that means?"

"No, no, no, tell us, tell us," cawed a dozen crows at once.

"Of course you don't know. Most of you don't know anything." The old crow stopped and preened his feathers complacently. Finally he continued, "Well, I will tell you. It means that the men will say that for every crow that is shot or captured in any way they will give one of the shiny pieces that they call money. It is a magic disk that you can get anything with. I found one in the road one day. If that happens, all the boys in the country will

be after us with their guns. Not only that, but they will poison us and trap us, until there aren't a dozen crows left in this mighty clan."

The chairman looked around in triumph to see if his words had made their proper impression. They certainly had. They had created consternation in the clan. All was excitement. A chorus of wild caws arose. Old crows craned their necks anxiously and looked hard at the president. Such consternation had never been known in the maple grove.

Finally the commotion subsided. "Wise leader," asked a sleek crow near the chairman, "what do you suggest? How would you ward off such a calamity? We will be guided by your wisdom. Such a calamity cannot be permitted. We are the scavengers of the country. What would become of all the dead horses and calves and other carrion that men are too lazy to bury if it was not for us? Why, the whole countryside would be filled with stench. Men ought to think of that."

"They ought to think of many things which they do not," said the president. "What I

would suggest is this. That we make a rule not to rob a bird's nest in sight of a house. That is the only safe way."

"Oh, my coat," piped grandpa. "I shall be as rusty as a rusty blackbird. No lady crow will ever look at me again. I was thinking seriously of taking a mate next spring and raising a fine brood."

This announcement was greeted by a great caw of derision from the lady crows, all of whom looked disdainfully at the old fellow.

"We won't worry any about your coat or your mate," said the chairman sternly. "You are rustier than any blackbird now, and there isn't a lady crow in the convention who would so much as look at you."

"Caw, caw, caw," chorused all the female crows. "He's a back number. He's a rusty old gent. We don't want him."

"You see how it is. You had better make the best of it."

At these stern words from the chairman who looked at the old chap in his most disdainful

manner the grandpa subsided and was very quiet during the rest of the meeting.

"It will cut off a large part of our nest robbing," said a dignified crow. "Most of the song-birds are in the villages or near the houses of men."

"That is so," agreed the chairman, "but there will still be good picking. There are the bobolinks in the meadows and the thrushes along the edge of the woods and scores of small birds that nest in the fields.

"It can't be helped. We have got to consider the clan as a whole. We are very important birds and our numbers must be maintained."

This announcement was greeted with a chorus of approval.

"Now," continued the chairman, "I am going to prescribe a very severe penalty. Any crow who is found robbing a bird's nest in sight of the abode of men must suffer the severest penalty that we ever inflict. He will have his eyes picked out by the clan. You all know that means starvation. So beware."

At this announcement a deep silence fell upon the clan. It was certainly a very serious matter.

"Now," said the president, "we will listen to the report of the chairman on membership. Let us see if we are holding our own."

A sleek, dignified crow, who was also something of a leader, took a commanding position where he could be both seen and heard, and made his report.

"Last year at this convention we reported five hundred and sixty members. I am glad to announce that to-day we have five hundred and ninety members, not including several crows who are absent. Some of our scouts are visiting other conventions."

"Caw, caw, caw. Good, good, good," resounded from every quarter. "Long live this clan. Caw, caw, hurrah, hurrah."

"I am able to make this final report," continued the chairman, "although nearly a hundred of our members lost their lives in the great freeze last winter when we were frozen in under the crust."

"That certainly was a sad event," remarked the president during the quiet which succeeded this terrible announcement. "It shows that the clan should be careful about digging in when there is liable to be a great freeze. For my part I would rather take my chances in the top of a pine or hemlock. You must all be more careful this coming winter.

"Hawks, owls and hunters have taken their usual toll from our ranks, but, thanks to our loyal mother crows, we have made our numbers good. I call for three cheers for the mother crows of this convention."

"Caw, caw, caw," resounded through the maple grove. At this the lady crows looked very happy and well satisfied.

"Nearly four hundred young crows were hatched this spring," continued the chairman, "of which nearly two hundred are here to-day. That is a good per cent. to survive."

"Good, good, good," chorused the clan.

"There is one fact that I wish to call attention to and to suggest a remedy. That is that so many of our old crows are blind in the right

eye. It comes, of course, from the fact that when we put our heads under our left wings on a cold night and go to sleep, we do not quite cover the right side of the head with the wing. Or if we do, in sleep we get careless and it becomes uncovered.

"Here is the cure for the evil. Always be sure that the head is fully covered when you go to sleep. Also occasionally change and put your head under the other wing."

"We can't, we can't, we have always slept in that way," protested several young crows.

"Yes, you can," contradicted the chairman. "You can get used to anything. It is a great handicap being able to see out of only one eye. It gives our enemies a chance to steal up on us. We all need two good eyes."

"We do, we do," cawed the clan.

"So take all pains in this matter," continued the chairman.

"Another thing that we should look out for is the fact that men are laying poison for us. Always inspect your food carefully before you eat it. I think this is all to-day. I con-

gratulate the clan on making so good a showing and I wish it a happy and prosperous year."

"It is a fine report," cawed the old leader from his perch in the tall maple. "I certainly hope we will have a good year. We will if my wisdom is heeded."

"Sure, sure," cawed his fellows.

"Now," said the chairman, "I will call for the report from the chairman on foraging. This is a very important report."

A rather rakish looking crow, whose wings had sometime been riddled with shot, flopped up to a commanding position and began his report.

"I am happy to announce," he said, "that the outlook is very good for this autumn. I can report three dead horses and two cows, which are buried so shallowly that we can easily get at them."

"Good, good," chorused the clan.

"In addition to that, there are a dozen calves and as many sheep."

He then proceeded to give the location of

each of these finds and delegated crows in certain sections to feed upon these caches.

" There are twenty cornfields within a mile of this grove where the corn has not yet been taken in. That is good feeding. Also there will be much scattering shelled corn after the shocks are drawn in. There are likewise many rye and barley fields and two bean patches where the beans shelled badly in the field. All this means good feeding for this autumn.

" I wish to ask you all to take pains to locate all the forage that you can for winter eating. That is when we go short. The winter is the rub. All the orchards must be visited and the apples that still stick to the trees noted. Haystacks near to the buildings accord good picking in the early morning before men are up.

" It is the early crow that gets his breakfast without having the farmer get him. So get up early and look out for yourselves. I think that finishes my report."

At the inviting picture of good feeding which this wise old crow had prepared, the clan fairly made the maple grove ring with their

lusty cawing. So much so that Mr. Brown and his son who were working in a distant field heard them plainly.

"What a racket the crows are making in the grove," said young Tom. "If we weren't so busy, I would go up and shoot a few."

"It is the annual gathering," returned his father. "They have it every year. What are two or three crows out of five hundred? You had better stick to getting in the corn. They have taken enough of it already."

"I was down at the house roosting in the old pine listening for wisdom," said the president when the cawing had ceased, "and I heard Mr. Brown say that women were very important this year. They were voting, or something of the kind. I do not know just what that means, but I guess we had better follow in their lead. So we will have a few words from our senior mother, Mrs. Black Night, who is so much revered by this clan."

"Good, good," chorused the convention.

Mrs. Black Night flopped up close to the shining chairman with a coquettish air and

craned her neck and said, "I am very happy that we have at last been recognized. We are the important members of the crow family."

"No, no," cawed several stern old male crows.

"Don't interrupt her," said the chairman. "Let her have her say. That is the way Mr. Brown does down at the house. Why, when Mrs. Brown gets to cawing, he can't so much as clear his throat."

"I repeat," said Mrs. Black Night with an injured air, "that we are the important members of this clan. We lay the eggs and hatch them and then look out for the young crows while you males are loafing about the country. If it wasn't for us the clan would disappear in a very few years. So we should be given our share of praise. We are good mothers. We have the good of the clan at heart and I am glad to say we do our work well."

"You do, you do," chorused the convention.

"I am not a speech-maker like our wise chairman or like Mrs. Brown, so wishing the clan good luck I will close." She retired to

her first perch amid a great cawing from the convention.

"I think this concludes the business of the day," continued the president. "I am very glad that we have had such a good meeting. Now remember all my words of wisdom and farewell until we meet again next year."

With these words from the sagacious leader the convention was closed. A few wise old heads lingered to talk over the affairs of Crowland and to make suggestions for the coming winter. But most of the clan were very eager to inspect the good feeding that had been reported by the chairman on foraging. So they flocked out of the maple grove by scores, some flying this way and some that, each eager to beat his fellow to the good feed.

In five minutes' time where there had been five hundred and ninety crows there were only a dozen or so. These, too, finally took wing and the maple grove was deserted. Thus ended this memorable convention of Division Forty-five and the black rascals all went back to their stealing and scavenger work, useful

in some ways, but very destructive in others. It is to be hoped that they will observe the warning of their leader not to rob birds' nests close to houses. But it is hard to teach old crows new tricks and I am afraid that we will often be awakened next spring by the cries of the song-birds when these black rascals rob their nests of both eggs and fledglings.

But such is the life of the out-of-doors. The larger prey on the smaller, and only the strongest and wisest survive.

CHAPTER XVII

WISE LITTLE HEADS

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WERE not many of the little furred friends of field and forest almost as wise as man, some of them would go hungry during the winter months, even if they did not die from starvation.

Man understands that certain times of year are for seed time and harvest. Accordingly he plants his crops in the spring, tends them in the summer and in the autumn gathers in grain, vegetables, and fruit, and stores them away for use in the cold winter months. So the wild creatures, while they do not have to plant and water crops, yet they gather the bounty of Mother Nature into their pantries and granaries in the autumn so that they, too, may be fed in the cold months.

If you do not already know, you never could guess how the beaver feeds himself during the long winter. Mr. and Mrs. Beaver and all the

kit beavers are bark eaters. In the late autumn the beaver repairs his dam, making it secure for winter, so that he will be sure of high water when the great freeze comes. After the dam has been attended to, Mr. Beaver puts in his winter supply of food. For this purpose he goes up-stream above his dam and cuts cords and cords of small trees, poplar, maple, alder, and other kinds. He always selects the kind of a tree that furnishes tender juicy bark. These trees he cuts up into logs about three feet long. These he floats down his lake and secures them in a large pile close to the dam.

Finally the great freeze comes and Mr. Beaver is frozen under the ice for the whole winter long, but his woodpile, on which he depends for bark, is also frozen under. So when he is hungry he simply goes to his woodpile and selects a stick. This he drags up into his house, which is situated on an island above the water line.

Here secure in their mud house, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver and all the kit beavers can eat their bark whenever they are hungry. The

freeze which locked him under the ice has also frozen the mud house until it is as strong as though made of the strongest wood. This is very important, for the bear or the wildcat may try to break in. But when this house is frozen up they will find it burglar proof.

The muskrat, who is the little cousin of the beaver, also provides against the winter months. He makes his house of the roots and plants which he is in the habit of eating during the summer. Then, when the winter comes, he begins eating his house. He has made the house much larger than he really needs, so it does not matter if he does eat a part of it during the first of the winter. He is always sure to have a room or two left in which to live in the spring.

All the little field-mice who live in the grass roots under the snow have plentifully provided against the long winter. Every few feet in their runways under the ground they have builded a pantry. In these pantries are grass and weed seeds, and grain—all the things that make up a mouse larder. The fox often digs

down under the snow to try and catch Mr. Mouse, but his runway is so long and winding that Mr. Fox does not often get him.

The chipmunk is also a wise little chap. He has made himself a winter sitting-room with a pantry near it, under the roots of an old beech-nut tree at the edge of the woods. So when winter comes, all Chippy has to do is to sleep and eat. Thus eating and sleeping he dreams the winter away, warm and snug.

Even the insects such as the honey bees and the ants take thought for the future. We would not think that small creatures such as these would have this knowledge, but they do. Mother Nature has given all of her little creatures knowledge enough in each case to take care of themselves.

A beehive is one of the most interesting houses that I know of. The sky-scraper in the great city may hold a thousand people perhaps, but this little white house on Bee Street holds from five to ten thousand inhabitants, all ruled over by a queen. She is a most remarkable queen too. During the season while she is lay-

ing, she produces two or three thousand eggs each day. This is to keep the life of the hive going, for the old bees are always dying. The life of a bee is only about a month and a half. So the young bees have to be continually hatched.

But the greatest wisdom of the bee is shown in his ability to know that the winter will be long and cold. He also knows that all the flowers from which he gathers honey will be gone in the winter, so if he is not to die then he must lay up honey for the winter use.

Thus from the time that the first apple blossom comes in the early spring until the last goldenrod fades in the autumn, the bees are busy gathering honey. It is the lady bees that do all the work. The male bees are called drones and they do not gather honey. There are usually several hundred in each hive. When they get too lazy, the lady bees sting them and kill them. This is the way they are punished for their lack of prudence.

Perhaps you have wondered where there are half a dozen hives in a row how each bee knows

which is his hive and where to go. This is the way:

There are very wise sentries stationed at the door of each hive and if a bee attempts to go into another beehive the sentry stings him and kills him. This is a terrible penalty, so the bees are careful to go into their own houses.

The ants also are very prudent. If you will notice an ant hill in the summer-time, you will find that the ants are very busy running to and fro laying up their winter store of food.

The ant hill is a small republic and is ruled over by wise ants, just as our country is ruled over by our president. So you see the bees and the ants had the first kingdom and the first republic. In this particular they were ahead of man.

Thus it is all through the wild life Mother Nature has given wisdom and foresight that often puts to shame the wisdom of man. Of course there are foolish animals just as there are foolish people. These sometimes neglect to provide against the coming of winter but

they always have to pay the price, so usually they are very careful.

It would be well for man if in many ways he would copy the wisdom and the foresight of his wild kindred. Thus he would escape the day of want, and the passing months would always find him with his pantry-shelves and his bins full. Then he would not mind, though the winds howled and the storms beat, for his house would be well fortified against hunger and cold.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HUNTER HUNTED

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Red Fox is a mighty hunter. For his size and weight, he is probably the most successful hunter in the carnivorous kingdom. There are many reasons for this. In the first place, he is very fleet of foot and has great stealth in stalking quarry. So whether it is a straight-away run for life, or a sudden spring after long waiting, he is equally well equipped. His nose, hearing, and eyesight are of the best, and his wits have no betters in the domain of wild creatures, so all these things help to make Red Fox the mighty hunter.

Then, his kind have been hunters ever since the first fox stalked the first rabbit, so it is bred in the bone. His hunting is also varied.

Some carnivorous animals stick to a few easy victims, but not so with Red Fox hunting.

On moonlight nights, he may be seen in the meadows hunting field-mice.

This is the time when the mice come out of their runways to play and it is also the time for Red Fox's best hunting in the meadows.

When Mr. Fox is desperate, he will dig under two feet of snow, then into the frozen grass roots, and pull the field-mouse out of his hiding-place. I have often seen the dead grass which came from the mouse runway on the top of the snow in winter-time.

Such wary birds as the partridge have to match their wits against those of Red Fox. He will stalk the mother partridge while she broods a bevy of young under the top of a fallen tree and gobble up the whole brood if he can. Or perhaps in winter on a very cold night he will dig the partridge out from under a foot of snow where the poor bird has taken refuge to keep from freezing.

On moonlight nights in midwinter, the rabbits in the rabbit warren like to play tag. They will spend hours chasing one another up and down in the laurel and small spruces. But often while they play a dark sinister form with two yellow eyes stands under a bush watching.

EVEN THE CUBS HUNT INSTINCTIVELY

At just the right moment when the play is at its height, there is a sudden rush and the rabbits flee in every direction. For a few seconds there is a desperate race for life. Out and in they twist, then there is a pathetic cry for all the world like the cry of a baby. This is when Red Fox's deadly jaws close upon the back of the unfortunate cottontail.

One shake of his head and the trick is done. Then he throws the dead rabbit over his back and trots off home to his burrow and perhaps a litter of young foxes.

In the early spring, he may steal down to the edge of a river or lake and swim for twenty rods with the tip of his nose just showing, being careful not to make ripples. At last he reaches his victim and a duck will suddenly disappear under the water. When it comes up it will be dead and firmly held in the jaws of Red Fox.

The hen-coop Red Fox also raids most successfully and this is often the cause of his undoing. The particular Red Fox of my story had made several raids on the hen-coops in the

village a mile from the mountain where he lived and this caused the Valley Fox Hunter's Association to swear vengeance against him and to plan a hunt that should bring his red pelt to their club rooms.

So as it often happens, the hunter had to take his turn and be hunted, not by his natural enemies of which he has few, but by man, the most cunning of all the foes of the wild kindred.

It was a clear crisp morning in early November. There was just enough sting in the air to make it as bracing as old wine. Along all the runways beside the streams and in the low places, a hard white frost had gemmed and adorned the weeds and grasses. All this wonderful lace work would disappear as soon as the sun was an hour high, but now it was very beautiful. Red Fox had gone that morning early on a specially daring raid in the village. The Valley Fox Club had cut in behind him quite by accident and put the pack upon his fresh track. Not that they knew he was in the village, for it was a mere coincidence. Just a

bit of hard luck on the part of Red Fox that any good hunter is liable to experience. So it happened that when Red Fox started to back track to his lair on the mountainside, he met the pack in full cry.

He at once knew what this meant. He had watched too many fox hunts from his lookout at the mountain-top not to understand. He knew full well that along the road between himself and the mountain and in all the likely runways men were posted with their deadly thunder-sticks. Dogs he did not much fear, but the men with these deadly weapons were different. He knew if he was to keep his hide that day he must not try to double back to the mountain at that stage of the game. Instead, he must lead the pack far across the country away from the mountain. Then the men would follow, hoping to get a shot at him on some of the crossroads. Hours later, it might be safe for him to try to double back to the mountain.

So Red Fox turned reluctantly, for he hated the idea of this long, hard chase and led the

pack at his best pace further and further from his native lair, where he knew was the only lasting safety.

It was a thrilling sight to the fox hunters as they sighted the chase on several occasions too far away for a shot; the Red Fox, his brush held high, belly to earth, galloping easily across the open country, the deep-throated pack in full cry a score of rods behind.

But Red Fox did not intend to use only his fleet legs. He also used his fox cunning. Once he stopped on a cliff and made a figure 8 of his track. He then jumped six or eight feet to a shelf and left the ledge by a series of great jumps. It was a maze of fox cunning that would have puzzled many a pack. It would have puzzled this pack also, had it not been for old Bugler, the leader. When this veteran hound ran into the tangle as he led the pack, he ranged a minute this way and that, then held his head high for a few moments and simply by his great nose and his knowledge of fox cunning took the trail above the ledge and all of Red Fox's planning went for naught.

When the hunters next sighted the chase Red Fox was only fifteen rods ahead.

He then tried running in a brook for a score of rods, but this merely served to wet his coat, while old Bugler picked up the fresh trail on the other side without the slightest difficulty. From this futile attempt to discomfort the pack, he tried the railroad track, running for several rods upon a rail where he would leave little scent, and then springing into some bushes down a steep bank, but this also gained him little advantage.

For another hour, the chase led across the open country, but it was getting more desperate with each mile passed. Red Fox was lolling, his tongue out, although the chase was only two hours old, and his brush had begun to droop, a sure sign that he was tired.

This open country running was clearly not his kind of a game, especially with old Bugler leading the pack, so he took to cover whenever it offered. This would have worked out well and might have given him some advantage, had he not been playing in bad luck. Once he

doubled back on the opposite edge of the woods from that in which he entered. The last dog in the pack saw him as he came out of the woods on the other side and sounded the alarm, so the entire pack turned, left the trail and cut across his large loop and were off for another straightaway with the fox leading by only eight rods. This so encouraged the pack that they redoubled their efforts and Red Fox had a hard time of it to beat them to the next cover barely five rods ahead. Here he was more successful and he emerged ten rods ahead, but this advantage was overcome as he was getting tired and they were soon upon his heels again, not over a hundred feet away. Something must be done and that quickly. In spite of himself, Red Fox had been heading gradually back toward his beloved mountain. He might meet a man with his thunder-stick any minute. They would hear the pack and know he was just ahead of them. They were all converging upon him. His case was desperate. At this point in the chase, a clump of spruce half a mile away was sighted. There might even be a hunter wait-

ing in that woods for him but it was his only chance, so he took it. Just as he entered the cover, a bright idea came to him. If he could jump his enemy Black Blanket, another Red Fox, he might double-cross him and put the pack on his trail. He owed Black Blanket many a grudge and this might be a way to pay him off. Red Fox knew that his enemy often lay in this cover during the forenoon. He even knew the spot where he usually was to be found, so he headed straight for it.

It was a very dense clump of low spruces, almost impenetrable. To his great joy, Red Fox scented his enemy as he neared the lair. He sprang straight into it and with an angry snarl at his adversary, crossed Black Blanket's own trail which he had just made. This strategy gave Red Fox new courage so he sprinted away at a good pace. There was now just an even chance that the pack would take his enemy's trail in place of his own. A few minutes later to his great joy, he heard the pack in full cry on the trail of Black Blanket. His yellow eyes gleamed with satisfaction

as he heard the pack in full cry after his enemy.

But the entire pack was not fooled. Old Bugler did not even notice the other track. He was after Red Fox and he knew his trail from that of all other foxes, so he took the track at the X and came after Red Fox at full cry.

As soon as Red Fox saw this, he knew that his doom was sealed. He had played his last and highest card and had lost. Bugler would catch him within a mile or two and then it would be a broken back for him. But he was a red fox and he would die game. No red fox ever gave up as long as he had the breath of life in him. He would even fight the great fox hound. He would at least leave his mark on the hound's hide. They should have something to remember him by. Just at that moment, he crossed the railroad track again and then like a flash remembered the deep cut. He had nearly been caught there himself one day by a passing train, and he had saved himself by springing to a shelf on one side in the middle of the cut. He could see the smoke from the

Great Thunderer far across the plains. If he could reach the cut and get upon that shelf, the Great Thunderer might save him. He put the last ounce of his strength into the race and reached the cut three rods ahead of the hound. Down the cut he raced straight toward the oncoming train. He could hear it thundering and rumbling. If he was not in time, it would crush him. He had seen one of his brothers horribly mangled by a train. But what did it matter? That would be no worse than old Bugler's deadly jaws, so he raced on. The train was barely three hundred feet away. It was thundering, snorting and hissing, the very demon of death.

Bugler was crying the cry of the pack at his heels. He gathered all his remaining strength and reached the ledge. Once he sprang and missed but he was up and tried again. The second time he missed, but still another spring he had left in him. This time with all the strength of desperation, he sprang and reached the ledge and safety, just as the train thundered by.

He lay down on the ledge panting and sobbing from exhaustion. The monster roared by, then when the smoke had cleared, Red Fox raised his head and looked anxiously for his pursuer.

At first he could not discover him, but he finally made out his head fifty feet away and further on, his mangled body.

Red Fox sprang lightly down from his ledge and warily approached the dead hound. For several seconds he stood looking at him. Then with a yawn of great weariness and perhaps also of satisfaction, he trotted away through the cut toward his beloved mountain.

He had beaten Valley Fox Club at their own game and was well content.

CHAPTER XIX

JOHNNY BEAR AND OTHER WINTER SLEEPERS

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JOHNNY BEAR is born in February down under the ground in the dark, in his mother's winter parlor. But before I tell you more of Johnny Bear and his sister, I shall have to tell you something of his mother, so you will know just how she happened to be living underground.

All through the summer months the old bear is roaming about the fields and woods. During July and August she lives on blueberries, blackberries, and any other berries that she can find. She will stand in front of a blueberry bush and swoop off the berries with her long tongue in a very lively manner. In the autumn she changes her diet to nuts and roots. She occasionally varies this with a young pig or sheep if she can find these delicacies.

Something tells her that the winter will be long and hard, and that she must lay up lots

of fat, so she eats and eats until her ribs are covered with fat.

By the time the first snows come she is almost as fat as a pig. Also about this time she feels very sleepy. She tries to stay awake, but spite of all she can do, the drowsiness steals upon her. This means that she is getting ready for her long winter sleep. So she searches about for a place to make her winter parlor.

She usually finds just the right spot under the top of a fallen spruce or pine tree. Here she digs under and burrows about until she has made a large hole where she snuggles down and finally the deep snow comes and covers her all over with warm white blankets.

She is so completely covered up that if you were to go very close to her winter parlor you would not know that a bear was there at all.

The only evidence that she was sleeping there would be a small hole in the snow. This is melted by her breath as she lies asleep. This is the bear's chimney, and the only opening in her parlor. While she is still partly asleep Johnny Bear and his sister are born.

The old bear almost always has twins. Once in a great while there are three little bears, but two is the usual number.

These little bears are very helpless little fellows and you would not think by their looks that they would ever be full-grown bears.

They are hairless and blind for several days. But they do not mind, for it is so dark down in this underground parlor that they could not see there if they had the best of eyes.

For the first month or six weeks they spend all their time nursing the mother bear and sleeping. Sleeping and eating make all young creatures grow rapidly. So it is with the young bears. When the old bear finally brings them forth into the great wide world in April, they are quite respectable little bears, as large as a small cat.

The very first lesson that they are taught, and this is the first lesson that all the woodland babies are taught, is to mind. All the woodland babies mind much better than children do. This is because their mothers are very strict. If mother bear told Johnny and his sister to

stay under a fallen tree out of sight while she went for food and they disobeyed her, she would box their ears most severely. This is a very necessary thing as there are many dangers in the great woods and the little creatures must mind their mothers if they do not want to come to harm. So strict obedience is the first law of the wild family.

The raccoon, who is the smallest of all the bear family, and who is often called the Little Brother to the Bear, is also a winter sleeper.

His winter parlor, however, is in quite a different place from that of Johnny Bear. When Mr. Raccoon feels the winter drowsiness coming upon him, he looks about in the woods until he finds a hollow stump about fifteen feet high. He climbs up this old hollow stump and inspects it. If it is hollow for several feet down inside, he concludes it is all right.

When it gets so cold and the snow is so deep that he does not want to venture outside, he will take possession of his tree and there he will sleep most of the winter through.

Chucky, the woodchuck, is another winter sleeper. All summer long he will store up fat, eating the farmer's beans, and other vegetables, until in the autumn he is just a ball of fat.

He goes to bed quite early in the autumn and we do not see him again until spring.

The smallest of all the winter sleepers is the chipmunk. Mr. Chipmunk is a very wise little chap. He has stored up a good supply of nuts and grain under the roots of an old tree. So while the wind howls outside and the snows fall, he eats and sleeps the long winter through.

Most of the reptiles and also the toads and frogs are winter sleepers. It is a very common thing to find in the late autumn a wood frog already sleeping in his bed of leaves. Mr. Wood Frog, who has a spotted, tan-colored coat, will find a place in a hollow where the leaves are deep. Here he will make himself a fine bed by wriggling down under the dead leaves. Finally the winds will cover him completely and with his head bent forward on his breast, and his hands folded on his knees, he

will sleep the winter away. As he sits there he looks very much as though he were saying his prayers. Perhaps he is saying frog prayers. Who knows?

Once when a boy I found a striped snake in a hollow tree in the winter time. He was frozen quite stiff. As he had his head slightly bent forward, it made a good crook and I called him my snake cane. I was rather careful, however, not to lean too heavily on him as I knew he was quite brittle in that frozen state. I carried him home and set him up behind the stove, without thinking of what might happen.

Half an hour later I heard a scream from my small sister. Mr. Snake had thawed out and was crawling slowly around the room. He was probably greatly astonished and was trying to make out where he was and what was happening.

One of the first things that the toads and frogs do after coming out of their winter sleep is to put on a perfectly new suit of clothes.

This they do by pulling off the old skin. There is a new skin under it, so without much

trouble Mrs. Frog and Mrs. Toad are provided with the very latest spring styles. Fortunately for them, however, the styles do not change, so they are all right (if the suit is new).

So you see this winter sleep is simply a wise provision of nature by means of which many of the wild creatures who could not live and procure food outside in the cold, sleep the winter away and come out again in the spring ready for the new life, none the worse for their long winter's sleep. These creatures are called hibernators, which means winter sleepers.

CHAPTER XX

THE FLIGHT OF RED BUCK

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Red Buck was an ordinary white-tailed Virginia deer, so he was really not red at all, but the reddish brown in his case was so much brighter than in the ordinary Virginia deer that I have elected to call him Red Buck.

He had been dropped five years before our story, early in May, in a dark spruce thicket, near the top of the Hoosac Mountains in western Massachusetts. He had been a wonderful fawn to look upon had there been any one but his dam to see him. He was so tall and rangy that he might have passed for a month old fawn at birth. But all who were there to see him were his dam and a white throat sparrow.

The sparrow, feeling that something out of the ordinary had happened, caroled away in the dark thicket with all his might, then flew away to find his mate and tell her. The delivery of Red Buck had been such a strain on

his dam who was only a two-year-old that she lay very quiet in the dark thicket for several days recuperating her strength. Even at the end of that time when she at last went forth to browse, she left Red Buck hidden in the dark thicket. She knew full well that if his sire, old Six Pointer, saw so promising a male fawn as Red Buck, he would promptly kill him, fearing a rival in the future, so she kept her wonderful fawn hidden away from all hostile eyes.

So, for the first month, the dark spruce thicket had been the fawn's only world. When he at last ventured forth with his mother, he was much astonished to see how large the world was and how many strange things there were in it. His life had been much like that of any fawn of the New England forest up to about the first of July, then something happened that quite changed the tenor of his life. His mother, while attempting to jump a six-foot brush fence, caught her fore leg between the two top poles and broke it.

The farmer, on whose farm they had been

trespassing, found her limping about on three legs and reported the find to the game warden. That official came and investigated and seeing that the break was a bad one, he shot her, intending to catch Red Buck and take him to a local deer park, but he had reckoned without his host, for Red Buck at once took to his heels, or rather hoofs, and disappeared so completely that the warden could not even find him. The farmer finally discovered that one of his cows which was running in the pasture was being regularly milked. At first he could not account for it, but he finally laid the theft of milk to the motherless fawn.

As the cow was farrow and not giving very much milk, he forgave the offender. Finally, Red Buck got lonesome and took up his abode with several calves on the farm which were pastured out in a small lot. He could almost always be found there running with the calves.

When the children at the farmhouse discovered this, they at once set to work to make his acquaintance. This was a long and arduous task, and it took several weeks, but they

finally had the fawn so he would eat out of their hands. Thus Red Buck had grown up the first summer more as a domestic animal than one of the Wild Kindred.

When the open season on deer came round late in November, the farmer knew full well that the children's pet would be one of the first to be killed because he trusted man, so he took pity on him, and at the risk of being fined himself, coaxed Red Buck into a stable and kept him until the open season was over. After that, he was turned loose again.

When his playmates, the calves, were brought up to the barn, Red Buck wanted to come with them, but this the farmer refused.

So while they were snug and warm in the barn, Red Buck lived on the outside, and fought the cold and the storms the best he could.

The farmer placed a pile of hay for him in an open shed and also allowed him raw turnips and other vegetables. But he was not the tame little creature he had been in the summer. Instead, he was larger, wilder and more im-

petuous and determined in his ways. His favorite retreat was a clump of hemlocks half a mile from the house.

Late in the winter, he ceased coming to the farmhouse and the children greatly missed him. During the following summer, he was rarely seen. Occasionally, he would be discovered with the cows, but he never came back to his old haunt among the calves.

The following autumn, he had been a very respectable spike horn buck and had mated with a female deer of his own age. They had yarded with several older deer in the Great Bear Swamp which was the favorite retiring place for the deer in the Berkshires. This was a tract of almost impenetrable swamp, five miles across. Here the deer had been quite safe for the winter.

If the children could have seen the tiny fawn that trotted after Red Buck's mate the following spring, they would have been delighted.

That fall, Red Buck had fared rather badly. He had been shot at several times and had escaped to the great swamp the last day of the

open season badly wounded. But the deer is very hardy. Buck shot he does not mind if they do not strike a vital spot. So after a hard week of recuperation he was almost as good as new, full of fight and more wary than ever. He had learned much about his worst enemy, man, and it was to stand him in good stead in the future.

The next great event in his life was in the following autumn when he engaged in a deadly fight with his natural enemy a savage old buck who had dominated the Berkshires for several years. For an hour they had struggled in deadly antler play, striking and thrusting, advancing and retreating. Then their horns had been locked together as though with bands of steel. For three days they had thrashed and tugged, snorted and stamped, gnashed their teeth and foamed, tearing up the turf and streaking their sides with foam, but all to no effect. Then, at last, when there had been great danger that they would both die of slow starvation the older buck's horn on one side had broken and the combatants were free. For

an angry five seconds they stood glaring at each other, then they had fled in opposite directions as fast as their feet and legs could carry them. They had seen enough of each other for all time.

During the fourth open season, Red Buck had been very wary, so he had returned to the Great Bear Swamp at the first sound of shotguns, and had escaped for that year.

Now in his fifth year, five days before the open season, he was the largest, proudest buck in the Berkshires, a king among the Virginia deer of New England. Much is said and written about four hundred pound bucks but they are rarely seen. Red Buck was a prize that any hunter might well have been proud of. He probably weighed about three hundred and fifty pounds, which is a very large buck. His coat was a glossy, reddish brown, with the red predominating, so that in some lights he really looked red. He was deep-chested and powerful. His hind quarters were heavy, and the muscles on his rump were wonderful to look upon.

His forearm was like whipcord as were all his muscles. When he ran, these same muscles slipped so easily under the hide that it looked as though all of his splendid mechanism was oiled and greased. No human-made machine ever ran so smoothly. His antlers were large and shapely, and his eyes were dark and full of fire.

His face was clean cut and his nostrils wide. Altogether he was a wonderful running machine, one of the best ever designed by nature. So it was a rather remarkable undertaking that the Renegate Pack assayed when it undertook to run Red Buck down. But they were hungry and his three hundred pounds of deer meat looked good to them.

The Renegade Pack were five outlaw dogs. They had gotten in badly with the Berkshire farmers by their deprivations as sheep killers. In fact, that was what had made them outlaws. They were led by a large collie whose name, when he had been a respectable dog, was Shep. The collie is only a generation or two removed from the wolf, so he will slip back into the wolf

state more readily than any other dog. Put a collie pup into a den of wolves and in the autumn, this full-blooded dog will be hunting with the wolf pack just like one of them. This, although the collie is one of the most lovable of dogs.

The Renegade Pack had formed the wolf habit of hunting in a pack. They hunted rabbits and foxes and always caught their quarry if it did not hole. They had also hunted sheep and calves and made many raids on chicken coops, although this was not really in their line.

The largest of the pack was a half-blooded Newfoundland and Siberian blood hound named Bruiser, weighing perhaps seventy pounds. The rest of the pack were two hounds of doubtful breeding and a bulldog, named Towser. He it was who always came in at the kill and got a death grip and did not let go until the fun was over.

The Renegade Pack started Red Buck on Wednesday morning, five days before the open season. He had often seen them either alone

or in the pack and he despised them, one and all. They were a lot of mongrels. They could not catch him and if they did he could fight them all to a standstill, so Red Buck did not much worry when the pack started him. He just trotted along in front of them keeping well out of their way, but not paying much attention to them. They would soon discover that he was not their sort of game and let him alone.

If Red Buck did not hurry for the pack, neither did the pack seem inclined to hurry him, but they kept him on the move. They spread out in a fan shape, with the hounds on either wing and Shep in the middle. Shep, Bruiser and Towser all ran by sight, and the hounds on the wings would pick up the scent if they lost sight of their big game. For the first two or three hours Red Buck thought it more of a joke than a real dead earnest race for life, something that was annoying but not serious. If he stopped to browse they were sure to catch up with him when Shep would begin barking. This so annoyed him that he would at once leave his browse and trot away

to another birch. But all birches were alike to the pack and the great deer would no sooner begin nibbling at the tender twigs than he was admonished by Shep's sharp barking to move on. After about three hours Red Buck decided that he would lie down for a spell in a thick clump of spruce. He was no sooner ensconced in a comfortable bed of dead leaves than the pack appeared. Three heads were thrust out from as many hiding-places in the thicket and three pairs of sinister eyes glared through the semi-gloom at him. As though this was not enough Shep set up his high-keyed barking and old Bruiser a deep baying. Then a fit of rage came over Red Buck. He sprang to his feet and with an angry snort charged at them.

But he could not charge in three directions at once, so he selected old Bruiser upon whom to vent his rage. But the dog ran into some thick cover and soon eluded him. Just as Red Buck lost sight of the big dog he felt a sharp twinge in his hind leg just below the gambrel joint. This was getting serious. He wheeled

sharply just in time to see Shep slip between two trees and out of his reach. The dog, with his wolf cunning, had struck for the deer's large ligament seeking to hamstring him. Six inches higher and he would have accomplished his design.

Red Buck was quick to recognize this great danger, so he broke from cover to the open fields and he did not allow himself to be caught in this way again.

Still snorting and boiling with rage, and with the slight wound on his shank reminding him that he had no mean adversaries to face, Red Buck adopted a new policy. He would show these mongrels a bit of speed.

It would be an easy matter to put a few miles between himself and them, and they would probably tire of the chase once they saw how fleet he was. So he galloped away like the wind and the last he saw of the pack that afternoon they were forty rods behind following persistently. He ran steadily for three hours. He skirted the entire Hoosac Mountains, swam the Hoosatonic River three times

and did what he could in other ways to muddle up his trail for the Renegade Pack. When he at last felt free he put in half an hour browsing and then lay down to rest, this time in an opening in the woods where he could watch from all sides. To his great disgust, at the end of the fourth hour he heard the hounds baying in the distance and in another half-hour the entire pack were up with him. They did not approach too close, but circled about baying or yelping. With an angry snort Red Buck sprang up and charged them. First at this dog and then at that one, but the wary canines always kept close to cover and dodged behind trees and turned sharp corners.

After several futile charges he gave up this mode of attack and made for the Great Bear Swamp. That thick cover had always been his stronghold and he thought it would save him now. He did not think the pack would follow him there. Men never had.

The Great Bear Swamp was the most hopeless morass in western Massachusetts. It was rather densely timbered for a swamp with

larches, balsams, soft maples and osier, with a great growth of laurel. But the ground was rather treacherous, for it was interlaced with dark patches of water covered with green moss. Red Buck knew all these bogs and he carefully avoided them. He had learned them through many a sad flounder in their depths. It was a swamp that few hunters cared to penetrate, so it was with much confidence that the great buck fled to its very heart. He lay down on a mossy hillock under a large larch to await developments. He felt sure as long as he kept quiet he was safe from his pursuers, but he was mistaken. In an hour's time he heard the hounds crying at the edge of the swamp on his trail, but their baying did not stop there. Instead it came steadily on to the very heart of the swamp, and in another half-hour the pack were besieging him again.

True they did not come very close, but it was just menace enough to anger him. So he got warily up and ran for the further side of the swamp.

He would try again what speed could do for

him. He had not really shown the pack his best pace in the run of the afternoon. There was still time to put fifteen miles between him and his tormentors.

So Red Buck again fled precipitately, this time going to the north. He selected the most rugged country he could find and made the trail as difficult as crossing rivers and roadways and running in thick cover could make it. By nine o'clock he was rather tired himself. By this time he was near the Vermont line, so he decided to rest for a couple of hours and then to take his late supper.

For a full hour he was unmolested, then to his great surprise the disgusting cry of the hounds again floated to his keen ears. He got up hurriedly, browsed for a few minutes until his tormentors came up and then doubled back southward, going over nearly the same trail that he had made to the north. The Hoosacs were his home and he felt safer there, even though it was also the home of the Renegade Pack.

Red Buck reached the Hoosacs by eleven

o'clock and had an hour's respite from his pursuers, but by midnight he again heard the yelling of the hounds and in another half-hour they were up with him. So he sprang up from his comfortable bed and fled on through the dark night.

As the haunts of men were forsaken he took to the open country where the running was easier and gave them a stiff chase to the south.

Residents of Stockbridge heard the full cry of the pack in the small hours of the morning. As daylight was breaking the great deer again doubled back along the mountains toward his home haunts. All day Thursday he fled and the pack pursued. He was not much afraid of the mongrels, but flight seemed his only course, and he did really dread having them corner him in close quarters, for the wound on his shank still stung.

By Thursday evening the old hero was beginning to tire. True, he still ran like the wonderful running machine that he was. None of them, not even Shep, could have caught him in a straightaway race, but he was beginning to

tire. It was not so much the running that tired him as it was this persistent relentless menace behind him. This thing that would not let him rest. Their yelping and baying tired him as much as did the running. That night the pack adopted a new plan. Shep and one of the hounds ran the quarry while the other three dogs lay in the deep woods sleeping. This night was a repetition of the night before. First the buck led them to the Vermont line, then he doubled back to the Hoosacs and in the small hours of the morning he was very close to the Connecticut line running in the open country.

The two dogs and the hunted deer reappeared on the slopes of the Hoosacs Friday forenoon when the trail was taken up by Bruiser, Towser and the other hound. This was an unfair advantage, but it could not be helped. The warfare in nature for survival is a cruel, stern warfare without mercy or ethics. So all that day the King of the Hoosacs had the fresh pack on his heels. Several times he turned to fight them. They were now minus

Shep, and he was the most to be feared of them all, but it was almost a hopeless task to fight them. When he charged they merely slunk away. If he charged one, another was at his heels snapping at his vital spot, the great cord above the gambrel joint. So after chasing them out and in through dense cover for half an hour he decided that this tired and fretted him more even than running, so he again took to his fleet limbs.

He swam rivers and climbed mountains, plunged into deep swamps and through bramble patches. He doubled and turned, or ran for miles in a straightaway, but all to no avail. No matter how hard or how fast he ran, sooner or later he would again hear the baying of the hounds.

Friday evening found him again hugging the skirts of old Hoosac, hoping vainly for a respite from his pursuers, but there was to be none. Here Shep and the other hound again took up the trail and the great Buck again fled through a starless, moonless night running in the open country. By daylight he had crossed

into New York, where he again doubled toward home. By this time his flanks were covered with sweat and he galloped heavily. He took even the low fences with difficulty.

He did not at once strike for the Hoosacs but kept to the south. By the middle of the forenoon the other three dogs picked up the trail on the skirts of old Graylock and the first two dogs retired for the day. Fresh from their night sleep the new pack pressed the old fighter hard. Now for the better part of the way they were running by sight. The great buck could no longer gallop, though he still trotted at a good clip. But even so he was occasionally obliged to quicken his pace to keep the yelping dogs from his heels. All through Saturday they pursued him. He crossed the great divide and came down its eastern slope, crossing rivers, plunging through deep chasms and climbing steep banks, but he could not shake his pursuers. Finally a wonderful thought came to him. He would flee to a lake to the east, which was two miles in length, and if he could put that much water between himself and

the pack he felt sure they could not follow. Eagerly he plunged into the cool water which was skimmed with ice along the shores, but even this refuge was to prove treacherous, for the pack quickly skirted the lake and when Red Buck, badly spent from his long swim, staggered up the bank on the other side they nearly got him, and he received another wound in his shank, this time from Towser. Fortunately for him the bulldog did not get a good grip, and he simply lost a little hide. Otherwise his fate might have been settled then and there. So he wearily turned his antler-crowned head back to the home land and fled.

But his great strength was waning. His flanks were white with foam. His breath came through his widely distended nostrils with whistling gasps. Every mile or two he was obliged to turn and fight off the pack. By evening he wearily climbed the sides of old Graylock and looked back at his pursuers. To his dismay he saw that Shep and the other hound had joined them. He now for the first time felt wild, desperate, hunted. This thing

which he could not fight was closing in on him gradually. They had taken his strength, his courage. His fighting spirit was slowly waning. Out and in among thick cover, into deep gulches, in thick tangles of swampland all night he ran heavily, recklessly. He was no longer afraid of breaking a leg. The only thing he now feared was this fearful yelping, yawning danger which hung like a dead weight upon his foam-streaked flanks.

When the first faint streak of dawn appeared in the east he came to bay at a wedge-shaped crevasse in a sheer cliff. It was an ideal spot for a fight to the finish, one that nature must have provided for him.

When the Renegade Pack closed in they saw him there, his hind-quarters wedged in, with the wall on three sides presenting only his sharp cutting hoofs and his many-pronged antlers. His head was lowered, his legs were wide apart because of weakness, but his eyes blazed and as the pack came close he stamped and snorted with the fury of battle.

Towser, who had never seen a deer before at

such close range, whimpered with joy. It was his time. He would get the death grip, so he lunged straight at the desperate fighter without even recognizing the danger. Like a sledge-hammer the buck's hoof descended and Towser rolled upon the ground with a broken back. This put him out of the fight, and he crawled away into the bushes to die a few hours later. This event made the pack more careful, so they sprang and snapped and worried their quarry for another hour, but at last one of the hounds ventured too close and the great deer's hoof descended fairly upon his skull.

It cracked it like a ripe nut and the hound joined Towser behind the firing line among the mortally wounded.

Two hours later the other hound got a fatal antler thrust that passed nearly through his body and put him out of the battle.

The fight now lay between old Bruiser and Shep on the one hand and the King of the Hoosacs on the other. How it would have ended is uncertain, although the dogs would have probably worried their quarry to death,

had it not been that Tom Remmington, one of the game wardens of the Berkshires, had heard of the chase that morning and taking his Winchester had gone out to investigate. A traveler on the country road had reported that five dogs were running the King of the Hoosacs and that he was nearly all in. "They will get him in another half day if you don't get them," had been the report. So Tom had slipped five cartridges into his Winchester and gone to investigate.

He had taken two snap shots at a bob cat which he had bounced in a thicket, so he finally arrived on the scene with three cartridges in his rifle. He was guided to the spot by the deep baying of old Bruiser.

For half an hour he could not locate the fight, due to the echoes which rolled along the mountainside in a deceitful manner, but when he finally rounded a cliff and came in full sight of the fray it was a battle royal that met his eyes. The great deer was down on one knee, he was wedged as far as possible into the crevasse, while old Bruiser had him by the nose

and Shep had a firm grip on his free fore legs. They were holding him like a vise and were in the act of pulling him down. Two careful shots stretched the dogs by their intended victim and left the King free from the Renegade Pack. Slowly he arose, snorting and stamping at his new enemy. For he recognized this man with the thunder-stick as his most deadly foe. Yet this enemy had seemed to deliver him from the grip of the dogs. He could not flee without running straight toward the man. Yet he could not stay there; he had learned it was dangerous to stand still in the sight of man. So he trotted slowly toward him.

The warden's first impulse was to give him the remaining bullet in his rifle. He was a prize. He could let him lie until the morning when the open season would be on. He raised his gun. Then he noticed how spent the King was. He could barely move one leg by the other. Then another thought came to him. He could not shoot a deer with a rifle even if it had been a day later. Then, too, he was the

game warden; if any were to keep the law he must set them the example. So he dropped his Winchester to the ground and took off his hat and saluted as the antlered King trotted slowly by him. As the deer passed he gave the warden one fearful hunted look that he did not forget for many a day. Then he turned and trotted away to the cool fastness of Great Bear Swamp to recuperate his strength and courage in hiding. There he slept and ate and slept again until the open season was passed. So perhaps his long flight which caused him to lay low during the open season saved for another year the finest set of antlers in the Berkshires for their rightful owner.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LONG WINTER SLEEP

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THE long winter sleep is one of the tender and beautiful phases of nature, although it seems so cold and cruel. Really Mother Nature takes the very best care of all her children during this time of rest and recuperation.

Every twenty-four hours man retires to his bed for sleep in order that he may regain his strength and repair the waste of the day, so nature tucks her plants and flowers to sleep once a year in certain climates in order that they may rest and get ready for new life and growth.

First the North Wind, who is the evil spirit of winter, strips the dead leaves from all the trees. Then they are like ships that have furled their sails, so that they may withstand the great blows of winter and not be broken or blown down. Thus the North Wind helps them where he seeks to harm. He also scat-

ters the seeds of plants and trees in every direction. Such seeds as those of the maple which have wings can fly a long way. In this manner the forest spreads and little new trees spring up miles from the parent tree. The birds also have been carrying seeds all through the summer and autumn, so that the earth has been well stocked with new seed in readiness for the coming of spring.

In many of the hollows the dead leaves are piled high, covering with warm leaf blankets the arbutus, the hepatica, the anemone, and many other wild flowers. Some trees there are which do not shed their garments at all, or they do it so gradually that we do not notice it.

These are the non-deciduous trees, such as the hemlock, the pine, the spruce, and all the other evergreens.

Every second year they shed their cones which contain the seeds, and thus keep up the forest.

At last when everything is in readiness, when the dead leaves have covered the wild flowers, and the trees and bushes are ready, there comes

the new snow. It is as soft and white as wool, and as clean as Mother Nature can make it. Then all the dead weeds and grasses along the roadside take on new beauty. The pines and the evergreens are festooned with great white plumes, and even the elm twig, as Lowell says, is ridged with pearl.

What a pleasure it is then to take a long tramp in the deep woods and behold this beauty and loveliness. We will find an army of chickadees at work in the woods. They are all busy hunting and eating the aphis, or bark louse, and they do a great deal of good.

The trees look quite different from what they did in the summer when we threaded the forest, but the promise of life is still there.

They are even growing in the winter-time, although we do not think so. Under the old bark the new bark is forming and all the wonderful processes of nature are going on just as though it was summer-time, only more slowly. Even before the dead leaves fell the new leaf buds were forming at the base of the old leaf

stem. This was largely what made the leaf fall.

The old was pushed one side by the new, just as nature is always doing.

The partridge could tell you all about it, for he has been budding ever since the middle of last November. You will often find him stripping off the new buds in the alder bushes, and in the apple orchards, even before the first snow comes.

I love to think that all the time they are sleeping under the snow, warm in their white blankets, that the flowers and shrubs are dreaming of springtime and the touch of the first warm sunbeams of April.

The skunk cabbage, which most people despise, is one of the first wild flowers to awaken. It is this homely plant that hears the first call of spring, while the snow is still deep on the ground. It is a very common thing to find the skunk cabbage in bloom within ten feet of a snow-bank. It has a creamy white blossom, wrapped in its green folds, and this first spring flower is a favorite with many botanists.

The arbutus, which has been safely hidden in the dead grass, is also a light sleeper and wakes early. That flower, too, I have gathered, on a sunny slope of the pasture land, almost within arm's length of a snow-bank.

Along the brookside the pussywillows are swelling while the winter is still with us. Sometimes the January thaw will bring them forth. Dear little cats of the brookside. How often have your furry faces cheered me in winter.

The sugar maple is the first of the large trees really to feel the touch of spring. Then its sap will go leaping up into its branches each day as the sun mounts, and scurrying back into the roots at night.

This is the season of maple-sugar-making, which was known to the American Indians long before the coming of the white man. But there is a wise little woodpecker, called the Yellow Bellied Sap Sucker, who learned the secret of the maple even before the Indians. Perhaps the Indian saw him at work and tasted the sap, and so discovered the secret.

When the sap first begins to mount in the

sugar maple this bird will select a tree with a sunny south exposure and go up and down the south side, pecking little wells in the bark with his sharp beak. These wells are always deep enough to reach the white wood, and the sweet sap.

By the time he has made a score of wells the first one will be full of sap.

So up and down the tree he goes all day long drinking the sweet sap until he can hold no more.

Some cabinet-makers claim that it is these sap wells drilled in the sugar maple that make the beautiful wood called bird's eye maple.

But I am not sure as to that.

Most of the wild flowers, however, are not so hardy or so courageous as the skunk cabbage and the arbutus, and they prefer to await the call of Pan and the coming of the South Wind. Just as the North Wind announces the coming of winter, so the South Wind announces the coming of spring. Chinook he is called in the west, where he comes with great suddenness, causing the landscape to change in a single day.

But here in our New England he comes more gradually. Often the South and the North Winds fight for possession of the land for several days. But soon the old blusterer is driven back, and the South Wind has things all his own way.

Then he comes dancing over hill and dale, calling low sweet strains to all the wild flowers, trees and shrubs. Up from their leaf mold beds the flowers come dancing, fragrant, and new as a new day, sweet and smiling as only spring can make them, miracles of beauty and loveliness. Then the birds sing, the brooks babble, the sunbeams dance, and all the world is glad.

Glad for the new life, glad for the new joy and the new hope. "We knew the South Wind would not forget," they all seem to be saying. "We knew Mother Nature would keep us safe and sound until another spring."

She certainly did keep them well, just as she keeps all her promises both to flowers and to men. So well she kept them that this latest

spring is always the most beautiful and wonderful spring that ever was, because it is God's latest miracle.

THE END

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